

Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

Vol. 65 No. 2 2021



On the Covers

Tigers of the Bengal Variety

Bengal tigers became one of the most conspicuous symbols of the circus during the 20th century. Along with clowns and ballerinas on rosinback horses, these larger-than-life felines were among the most prominent subjects of the advertising that let everyone know the circus was coming to town.

The Zirkus Olympia¹ poster on *Bandwagon*'s cover is a favorite depiction of this beautiful animal. Unlike the Ringling Bros. "charging tiger" lithograph,² Olympia's portrayal is one of a mysterious and almost nonchalant creature that has just escaped from the big top. Who wouldn't want to see this show and its splendid tigers?

The Sparks Circus poster³ on our back cover illustrates a "fighting-style" act in which a frenzy of ferocious striped beasts encircles an unnamed female subjugator. Clyde Beatty and Terrell Jacobs come to mind as perhaps the best-known American trainers of this genre of act, and artwork illustrating their heroics more often than not showed roaring monsters on the brink of attack with teeth exposed and claws extended.

Of course, real circus tigers lived and breathed beyond the imaginations of artists who brushed them into existence for advertising purposes.

In 1924 during the under-canvas part of its tour, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey offered an assortment of wild animals presented simultaneously in four steel-bound arenas. Christian Schroeder had polar bears, "Dutch" Ricardo worked lions, Rudolph Mathias put seven Bengal tigers through their paces, and Mabel Stark performed with a combination of tigers and black and spotted leopards.

The next season these cage acts were discontinued, but some of the large performing animals were transferred to the menagerie, including a few of the tigers that had been featured in the Mathias and Stark acts. One of these was a majestic male named Emir that was personally selected for menagerie duty by John Ringling.

During August of 1924, Chicago photographer Harry Atwell had taken pictures of Emir from just inside the end of the big cat's rolling den. You guessed it – the photograph on this page is one from that long-ago session. This timeless image of Emir appeared in Courtney Ryley Cooper's book *Circus Day*⁴ printed the next year. Pictures of the same tiger later appeared in Ringling-Barnum programs for the next



Emir in his rolling den, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, 1924.

several years. One might make the claim that Emir was one of the most magnificent tigers of his day. Evidently, John Ringling thought so.

GTP

Endnotes

1. After World War II, several privately-owned German circuses were stranded in the Soviet sector of the country that soon became the German Democratic Republic. Zirkus Barlay was one of the shows taken over by the government of East Germany in 1951, and eventually it came under the umbrella of the VEB Zentral Zirkus. In 1960, Barlay was given the new name of Olympia. This title was short-lived. In preparation for a 1968 tour of Czechoslovakia, Zirkus Olympia was re-named Berolina.
2. The artwork for this Ringling Bros. poster attributed to Charles Livingston Bull was copyrighted and first printed by Strobridge Litho. Co. in 1915.
3. This poster was used in 1931 during the last season Sparks was operated by John Ringling. Laverne McLean presented a leopard act on the show that year, but it does not appear that she or any other woman worked tigers.
4. Courtney Riley Cooper, *Circus Day* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1925).

Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society
2021 Volume 65, Number 2

Editors

Greg Parkinson, Editor
parkinsonUSA@yahoo.com

Chris Berry, Associate Editor

John Wells
Mardi Wells
Howard Pace
Tom Pallone

Design,
layout &
publishing

Bandwagon: The Journal of the Circus Historical Society (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968) is published quarterly by the Circus Historical Society for its members. © 2021.

Office of Publication

1075 West Fifth Avenue,
Columbus OH 43212. Periodical
postage paid at Columbus OH
and additional entry offices.
Postmaster: send all address
changes to Bandwagon: The
Journal of the Circus Historical
Society, 1075 West Fifth
Avenue, Columbus OH 43212.

Membership Rate

Circus Historical Society
membership is \$60.00
annually in the United States,
\$80.00 annually in Canada,
and \$105.00 annually for
international members.
Membership application and
information are available on
the CHS website at www.circushistory.org or by
contacting the Bandwagon
office.

Website and Back Issues

An index of *Bandwagon* articles
from earlier issues is available
online at www.circushistory.org. Back issues are available
from the Office of Publication.



Table of Contents

On the Covers	2
2021 CHS Convention	4
From the Editor	5
Discovered! The 1902 Ringling Bros. Circus Parade Film by Chris Berry	6
A Billy Button Bounty by David Carlyon	10
Through the Lens of Ted Sato A Colorful World in Black & White by Timothy Noel Tegge	16
Highways of Hope Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros.: 1937-1968 by Chris Berry	32
Splendid Rivers of Scarlet, Silver and Gold by Greg Parkinson	56
You Like it? I Do it Again. Dieter Tasso's Remarkable Career by Chris Berry	68
Remembering Carla Wallenda by Rick Wallenda	78

2021 CHS Convention

September 19-22, Trumbull/Bridgeport CT

Register Now!
Registration Form insert including registration fees
in this issue of *Bandwagon*.
Also available on CHS website

Convention hotel – Trumbull Marriott near Bridgeport
For reservations call 203-378-1400 and ask for the Circus Historical Society rate



Gala Opening Reception, historic films,
documentaries and book signings on
Sunday September 19

Events and tours at the Barnum Museum, Bridgeport
History Center, P. T. Barnum and Tom Thumb gravesites,
Seaside Park and the site of the original Barnum & Bailey
winter quarters

Sales Room with Private Vendors and CHS Bookstore

Papers, Presentations, Interviews and more!
Over 25 Presenters

Annual Luncheon Banquet on Monday September 20
Guest speaker Professor Eric Lehman of the University of Bridgeport
highlighting his book about Tom Thumb

Blockbuster Auction on Tuesday September 21

Convention Extra Options:

Full day at Eastern States Exposition and Big E Circus Spectacular
in West Springfield MA Wednesday September 22,
including side visit to Hartford Circus Fire Memorial

and/or

Circus Hermanos Vasquez Performance in Paramus NJ
Monday evening September 20

For more information visit
<https://circushistory.org>

Circus Historical Society

circushistory.org

Mission Statement

*"To preserve, promote, and share
through education the history and
cultural significance of the circus and
allied arts, past and present."*

Board of Trustees Officers

President

Don Covington
Coronado, CA

Vice President

Alan Campbell
Johns Creek, GA

Secretary/Treasurer

Kristin Lee
Boston, MA

Chris Berry
Scottsdale, AZ

Wayne McCary
East Longmeadow, MA

Maureen Brunsdale
Normal, IL

Julie K. Parkinson
Sarasota, FL

David Carlyon
New York, NY

Fred D. Pfening III
Columbus, OH

Richard Flint
Baltimore, MD

John Polacsek
Detroit, MI

James Foster
Charlottesville, VA

Al Stencell
Toronto, ON

Peter Gorman
Vancouver, BC

Kat Vecchio
Brooklyn, NY

Bruce Hawley
Stratford, CT

Deborah W. Walk
Sarasota, FL

Trustees Emeritus

Dave Price

Richard J. Reynolds III

From the Editor

Some people go fishing to relax. Others unwind with a page-turning novel that *The New York Times* claims is a best seller. Occasionally, I find such soothing contentment by simply running a circus "movie in my head" – an exercise first described to me many years ago as I previously noted in this column. For me it is just plain old fun to relive some of those happy moments in time that I can retrieve at will. I would think most of us have used our powers of recall like this at one time or another.

Until now, no one alive could recall the 1902 Ringling Bros. circus parade and run "movies" inspired by actually having seen that glittering procession. However, the recently uncovered and released film of that event long ago in Indianapolis makes it possible for anyone to visualize it. Fred Dahlinger and Chris Berry teamed up to review the rare footage, and their observations were shared on one of the first "Circus History Live" episodes. This issue of *Bandwagon* starts off with a look at that on-line program and its review of this extraordinary parade film.

In contrast to circus history that none of us are old enough to remember, other articles in the current issue of *Bandwagon* might actually elicit moving pictures for some of you. One such possibility is Chris Berry's review of Dieter Tasso's performing career. I have fleeting memories of Tasso's amazing slack-wire act from an afternoon in 1954, and I witnessed his comedy first-hand in more recent times at the Tommy Bartlett Show. Another of Chris' chronicles takes me back to the summer days I spent around Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. during the early 1960s. The article is a detailed retrospective of Kelly-Miller's 30-year story, and it is crammed full of absorbing information.

Perhaps it is human nature to give life to things we never really saw or experienced. For example, none of us were on hand in Asheville, Lewiston or Anamosa to witness the horse-drawn Ringling parades in those places. Yet photographs from those communities can still stimulate the sounds of horseshoes clapping on brick streets and the sight of bright red wagons rumbling by, putting it all into motion for us.

David Carlyon brings to life a comic equestrian theme that was front and center to the circus of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Billy Button is a subject that obviously pre-dates moving pictures, yet David paints his narrative in a manner that allows us all to envision and appreciate that vintage chapter in circus history.

Ted Sato images and the story that Tim Tegge shares with us will allow older readers to reminisce about specific occurrences during Ringling-Barnum's last years under canvas. For younger readers, these instances likely evoke times that can only be imagined. Either way, Tim's article brings to mind Sato's "colorful world in black & white."

Certain moments about glorious circus days gone by are vividly fixed in my mind. One of them is the memory of the amplified voice of Ringmaster Count Nicholas as he introduced the famous high-wire artist – "High in the dome of the big top...Carla...Wallenda!" Her thrilling act on Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. is one I run over and over in my head. Rick Wallenda's tribute to his mother plays into such wonderful visualizations.

My mind is wandering. Maybe I will take a break, close my eyes, and run another old circus "movie."

Discovered! The 1902 Ringling Bros. Circus Parade Film

by Chris Berry

*Al. Ringling
and his carriage were
the first unit in the circus parade.*

*All of the images accompanying this article were
provided through the courtesy of the Niles Essanay
Silent Film Museum, Fremont, California.*

The elderly couple who brought the old movie canister to the Essanay Silent Film Museum in Fremont, California in the summer of 2011 told historian David Kiehn that they had discovered the film in their basement in 1969. Despite the fact that it had been in their possession for 42 years, they had no idea what was inside.

"There were no markings on the can and no markings on the leader," Kiehn recalled, "but if you held it out and looked at it, you could see that it looked like some kind of parade." The veteran film historian then began researching the origins of the motion picture, using his vast knowledge of silent film production, along with clues that he discovered on the internet.



The motion picture cameras were set up at two locations. The Indiana State House in the background placed the parade in Indianapolis.

MILITARY SCENES AND PARADES.

S. F. 334. RINGLING BROS. CIRCUS PARADE. Price, \$18.00.

Approximate Length, 150 feet.

Through special arrangements with Ringling Brothers, we have obtained the finest circus parade caught by a moving picture camera. The parade is seen coming down a broad avenue with crowds of people on both sides.

The parade is headed by Mr. Ringling, followed by the finest band wagon in the world drawn by twelve magnificent horses. Following one another in rapid succession are open cages of lions, tigers, hyenas, bears, etc., so plainly that you can see them walking to and fro in their cages (something that is very hard to obtain in a moving picture). This is followed by the grand tableau wagons representing the different nations of the world; then come the riders on their prancing steeds which in turn are followed by the ever funny clowns without which no circus is complete. Even the children are not forgotten when the ponies come into view dragging their little tableaux wagons representing Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, etc. The pageant of riders representing the different nations of the world, the mounted band and last but not least, the camels and the great herd of performing elephants, making in all the greatest and grandest circus parade ever seen on a motion picture film. No motion picture exhibition should be without this film to complete the evening's entertainment.

Although the film was made to be shown in the Ringling Bros. "Black Top," prints were later sold to those who exhibited early motion pictures in storefront nickelodeons and tented theatres.

After he scanned a few frames of the film Kiehn realized that he was looking at a circus parade, and after he compared images of several wagons with photographs on the Circus World Museum website, he determined that the parade was that of the Ringling Bros. circus during the early 20th century.

Kiehn knew that based on the unique properties of the film stock, the motion picture had been made prior to 1910. After a painstakingly detailed analysis of the buildings and streetcar lines seen in the background of the film, he determined that the cameras had been set up in downtown Indianapolis in either 1902 or 1903.

Kiehn then used the Circus Historical Society website to locate the Ringling Bros. Route Book from 1902 which confirmed that the parade had been captured on film while the show was in Indianapolis on Monday, May 12, 1902.¹

The entry in the Route Book was rather insignificant, stating simply, "On Monday pictures of the parade were taken for the 'black top' annex."² Apparently one or more of the brothers had commissioned the film so that it could be shown in their portable theatre housed in a tent made of canvas that had been dyed black to keep out the sunlight.³

Additional information on the film and its subsequent distribution was also discovered in a 1908 catalogue from the Selig Polyscope Company now in the archives of the Essanay Silent Film Museum. According to the catalogue, exhibitors could purchase copies of the four-minute movie for \$18.00, and audiences were promised, "...the finest circus parade caught by a motion picture camera."

The catalogue then described details of the wagons and animals in the parade which was, "headed by Mr. Ringling, followed by the finest bandwagon in the world..."⁴

Some 119 years after Al. Ringling's carriage and the lead bandwagon, known as "The Lion Tableau," rolled through the streets of Indianapolis, the procession once again came to life on March 20, 2021 when the newly discovered parade film was screened worldwide on an episode of *Circus History Live*, the Circus Historical Society's newest out-

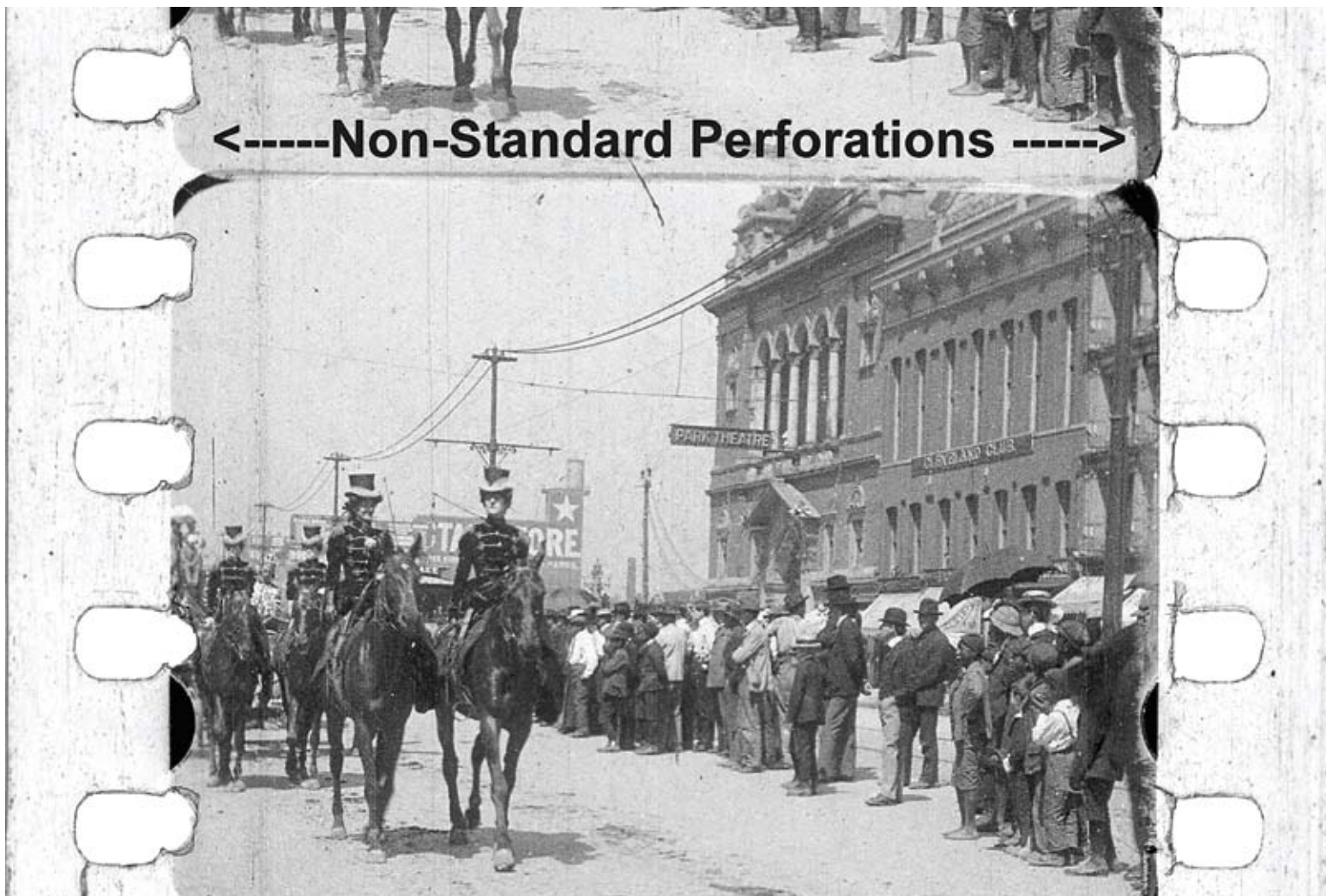
let for disseminating circus history. The monthly webinar was the brainchild of CHS Trustee Bruce Hawley who said that "it brings the rich history of the circus to life again for people around the world."⁵

Since *Circus History Live* launched in February, hundreds have viewed the live and recorded programs over the internet and have learned the stories of clowns Emmett Kelly and Dan Rice, Ringmaster Count Nicholas, sideshow impresario Ward Hall, the King Charles Troupe, circus owner Johnny Pugh and many others.

The March 2021 installment which featured the Ringling Bros. parade included narration from both motion picture historian David Kiehn and circus historian Fred Dahlinger, who provided insight on circus parades of the era along with details about the wagons and other units that were captured on film when Ringling Bros. was in Indianapolis in the spring of 1902.

"The surprising thing about the film is that it covers less than a third of the entire parade and excludes many of the better features," Dahlinger observed, pointing out that a Ringling parade of that time would have carried 40 to 50 units and would have taken 15 or 20 minutes to pass a fixed point. Among the wagons not seen on film, though it was with the circus in 1902, was the Clown Bandwagon, which carried carvings dating back to 1879. It was the oldest wagon in the Ringling parade that season.⁶

The film appeared to have splices which may account for some of the omissions. The breaks in the parade may have been because of the limitations of film cameras at the time



The non-standard perforations in the film strip were a clue that it was created prior to 1910.

or the possibility of editing and frame losses at a later date.

In addition to the wagons that were definitely with the circus in 1902 but not included in the film, some of the features that were promised in the 1908 Selig catalogue never appeared. The catalogue mentioned “grand tableau wagons representing the different nations of the world,” however, in 1902 those wagons had not yet been built, an indication that the catalogue description was not written until 1903 or later.

The Selig catalogue also specifically described two nursery rhyme inspired floats, “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Cinderella,” and neither were included in the donated film. Among the other wagons missing from the brief film were at least five of the Ringling’s fancy tableaux, including the show’s big tiger cage wagon and the hippo den.

During his narration, Dahlinger pointed out that despite the omitted wagons there was significant bonus material which included the mounted parade marshals, wild animals in their cages and the inclusion of participants in special wardrobe including drivers and assistants.

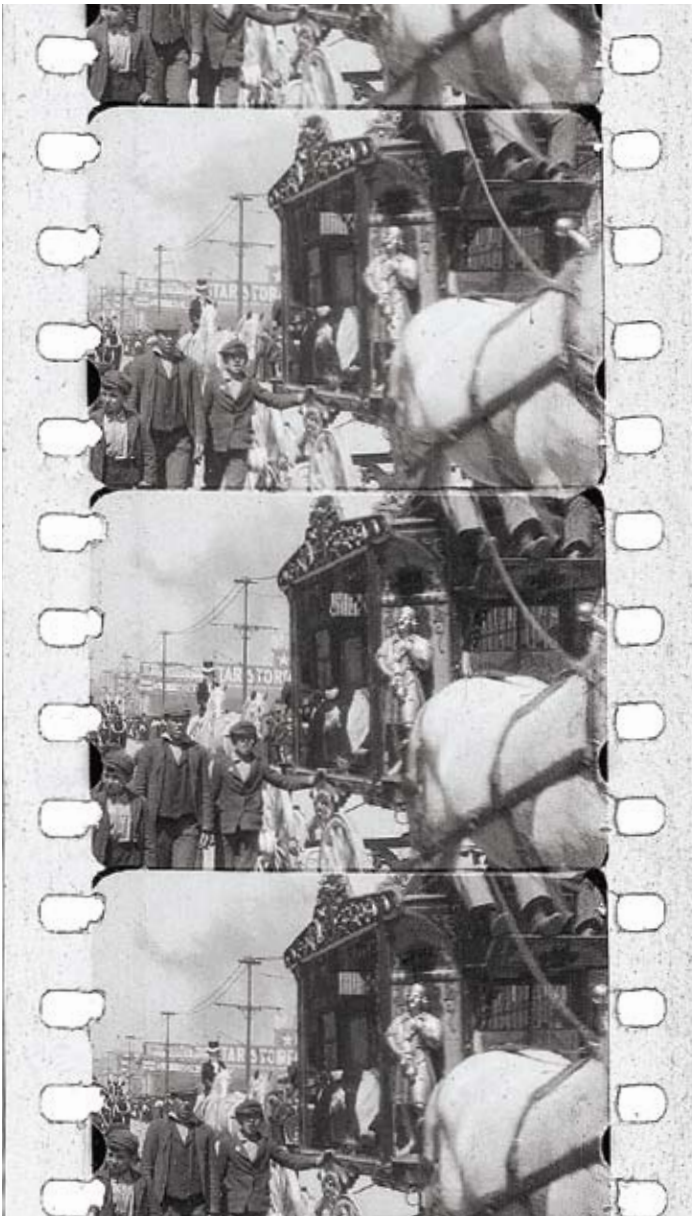
The parade also included a group of equestriennes rid-

ing sidesaddle along with a troupe of Moroccan tumblers riding Bactrian camels. In addition, hundreds of local spectators were seen on the streets including young boys and girls who followed the wagons and others who joined the parade on their bicycles.

Among the other treasures seen in the newly discovered film were several of the small pony wagons that the Ringlings had purchased from the W. B. Reynolds Circus in 1896 for their “Children’s Menagerie Department.” The film also provided historians with new evidence that several wagons, including a group of miniature cages built by Sullivan and Eagle, were used in the 1902 Ringling parade.⁷

The parade film also showed the famous Bell Wagon and one of the elaborate cottage cage wagons that had been acquired from the John Robinson Circus at the end of the 1898 season, along with the Ringling’s elephant herd, including “Fanny,” the show’s only African elephant.

Not seen on the film was the show’s new steam calliope which made its Indianapolis debut in 1902. Dahlinger speculated that the calliope was omitted simply because it came at the end of the parade and the camera may have run



The film showed the excitement that circus day generated as children are seen coming out of the crowd and joining the parade.

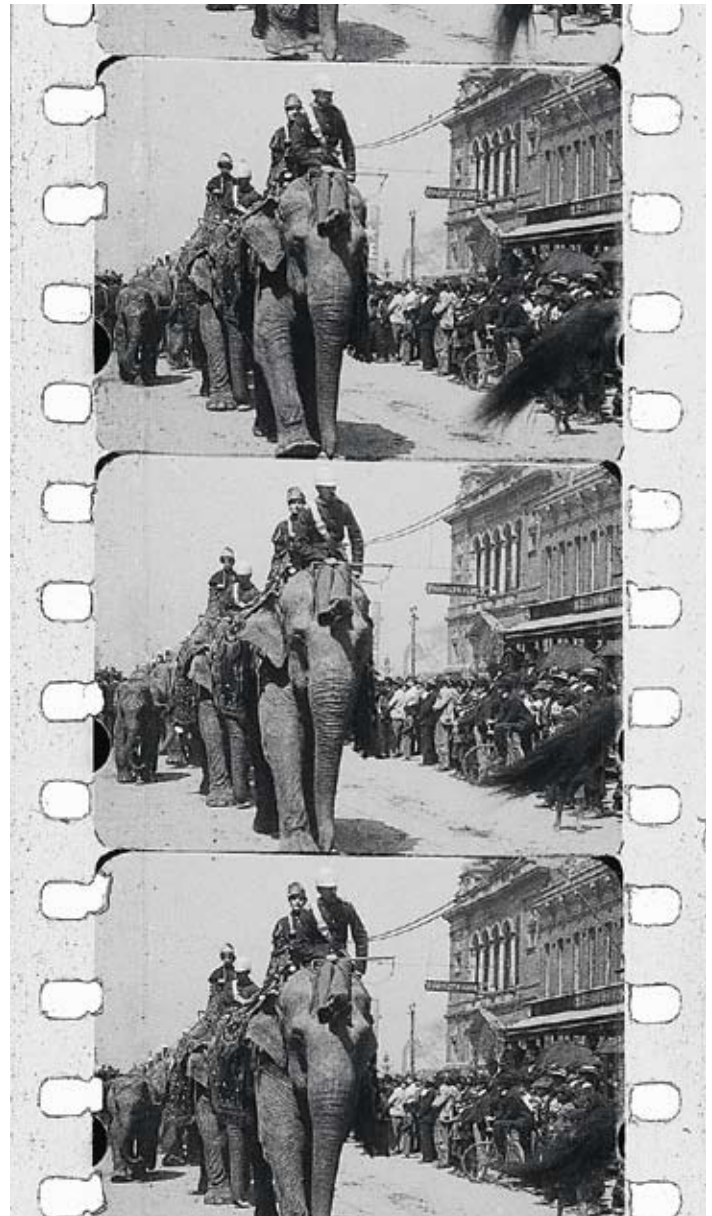
out of film.

This newly discovered and restored film of the 1902 Ringling Bros. circus parade is a rare and valuable piece of circus and film history, preserved for future generations and presented to those who study circus history through the generous cooperation of the Essanay Silent Film Museum.

Circus History Live: The 1902 Ringling Bros. Circus Parade can be viewed, along with all episodes of Circus Historical Society webinars at <https://circushistory.org/past-circus-history-live-videos>.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Fred Dahlinger, Bruce Hawley and Kristin Lee, along with Tufts University and David and



The elephants made an appearance near the end of the film.

Rena Kiehn of the Essanay Silent Film Museum for their assistance in producing *Circus History Live: The 1902 Ringling Bros Circus Parade*. **Bw**

Endnotes

1. David Kiehn, "Debut! Ringling Bros. Parade Film From 1902," YouTube, Oct. 22, 2020, retrieved May 8, 2021.
2. "Indianapolis Ind., Monday, May 12" *The Circus Annual, Season 1902*, (Chicago: Central Printing and Engraving, 1902), p. 16.
3. Fred Dahlinger, "Circus History Live," Mar. 20, 2021.
4. *Selig Polyscope Catalogue 1908*, Collection of the Essanay Silent Film Museum, Fremont, California.
5. Bruce Hawley email to the author, Apr. 11, 2021.
6. Dahlinger, op. cit.
7. Ibid.

A Billy Button Bounty

by David Carlyon

Circus fans and historians interested in the comic riding act Billy Button are fortunate to have a bounty of sources. Many accounts discuss the long-popular act, with its inept rider and various titles, including Billy Buttons, The Tailor's Ride to Brentford, and Johnny Gilpin. But because this bounty is scattered, I thought it would be helpful to consolidate the bits and pieces. This article combines commonly cited elements, mostly but not only American, with primary evidence I've uncovered, plus extended citations for readers who want to dip into the sources themselves.



The Diverting History of John Gilpin, losing his hat, his wig, and control of his horse.

Original print from William Cowper's, *The Diverting History of John Gilpin*, 1878

Philip Astley, founder of the first circus, presented *The Tailor's Ride* in his initial performances in London in 1768.¹ Historians differ on that "first" because earlier equestrian exhibitions and other variety shows resembled Astley's exhibition. Complicating matters, circus was not originally called "circus," a word reserved for its circular arenas. While Astley labeled his arena an Amphitheatre, his rival Charles Hughes used "circus," but only for his structure, the Royal Circus, Equestrian and Philharmonic Academy, often simply Circus. Still, Astley's is considered the first circus because of four elements: equestrian feats consistently joined to acrobatics and clowning; a performance in a ring; a stretch of performances rather than a single show or two; and others following the foundation he laid. A similar situation prevailed across the Atlantic. John Bill Ricketts introduced the first American circus in 1793, with a combination of acts, a ring, a run of performances, and a foundation for later shows. Yet two earlier riders performed this particular comic act. Jacob Bates presented it in 1773 in New York, and in 1785 Philadelphia, Thomas Poole performed *The Taylor humorously riding to New-York*, the title teasing the Quaker City's northern rival.² Meanwhile, American troupes would not be called "circus" until February 27, 1824. That's when

James W. Bancker applied the title of his Manhattan arena, "Bancker's New York Circus," to his company on a tour of upstate New York, starting in Albany. No longer simply presenting *in* a circus, Bancker presented *a* circus. His new use clearly filled a need. Within a year, other troupes employed it.³ Still, through its early decades the American enterprise remained sporadic, with an uncertain path forward. Long-term success was not guaranteed.

That made comedy crucial, something that drew people, helping circus survive. Because clowns would be minor figures until the 1820s, comedy mostly meant comic riding.⁴ That especially included this act of many titles. Digging into its history unearths assorted sources and connections, while indirectly evoking Shakespeare, Lincoln's assassination, belly buttons, and the Caldecott Medal for children's books.

Astley introduced *The Tailor's Ride to Brentford* in the summer of 1768. Later, for his Christmas shows, he put a monkey in the saddle, advertised as "a bad horseman, though he rides the taylor to Brentford extremely well." A monkey sitting on horseback can be cute, a fact that menageries would later exploit when they began as rivals of circuses. However, consistent comedy requires more than cute. It needs comic skill, and Astley resumed his place in

the act.⁵ His rival Hughes in turn presented *The droll position of the Taylor or The Maccaroni Taylor riding to Paris for new Fashions*.⁶

Circus regularly responded to the political and social life swirling around it. That included the *Tailor's Ride*. Astley's title referred to a political sensation that had recently captured England's attention. The radical John Wilkes ran for a seat in the House of Common, his campaign based on the revolutionary idea that people should have a voice in government. When supporters flooded Brentford to vote for their hero, ten miles west of central London, the rush made

drag himself to the saddle, facing backward or lying sideways across the horse. And fall off. A helper might join in, adding confusion. The horse, essential partner in the comedy, refuses to move or kneels or starts but balks, or bucks, or gallops as the tailor falls. Falls again. The horse bites the tailor's bottom and chases him out, or runs out alone. Sometimes the rider ended in spangled triumph, but triumph is not as funny. What mattered most is what regularly matters in comedy, performers in sync with an audience. Here that meant combining two of that horse-based world's key interests, riding well and falling off. Even those who didn't ride



The original tailor riding to Brentford, as a cartoon of a political joke.

Town and Country (London), Vol. 1 (Apr. 1769), pp. 192-93

news, with opponents putting their own spin on it, depicting the crowd as foolish and unruly. That was predictable. Politicians regularly frame an opponent's crowds as foolish and unruly. The pictured chaos centered on one image in particular, a tailor struggling on a horse to get to Brentford. The joke featured a tailor because of a common bias that, bent over their sewing all day, they were frail and physically inept, making them laughably unlikely riders. It was an old joke. Two centuries earlier Shakespeare had put a trembling tailor in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and a presumably starving one, Robin Starveling, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Astley capitalized on this new political fuss by joining it to the old bias of apparently bad riding. Only "apparently": effective comic riding requires skill in both riding and comedy. Variations of the act feature a rider trying to mount and slipping, mounting and falling off. Barely hanging on, he might

knew enough to admire riders with a good seat. Meanwhile, falls – when not disastrous – were funny.

Where did this act aim its mockery? Astley might have meant to satirize a "foppish and pretentious tailor" and the political mob he represented.⁷ That would have been consistent with his elite associations, as a former cavalryman offering lessons to ladies and gentlemen. And Wilkes supporters might have objected, believing the act ridiculed him – and them. Tailors did take offense. In 1830 they rioted to protest in Montreal and again in Quebec City, the violence great enough that the military had to be called out.⁸ Some titles indicated the Tailor act flattered audiences by teasing its neighbors, like the Philadelphia version mentioned above, *The Taylor humorously riding to New-York*. However, Astley was not taking sides. To boost business, he sought a mixed audience, and most in the mix would have simply

Ricketts's Circus,

LOWER END OF GREENE-STREET.



On Friday, August the 4th, 1797,
A GREAT VARIETY OF
EQUESTRIAN EXERCISES,

By Mr. RICKETTS and his COMPANY.

Mr. RICKETTS will exhibit a GRAND PERFORMANCE with the

Broad Sword,

Going through the Guards of different Nations, Offensive and Defensive, as in real action, upon the

Celebrated Horse, Cornplanter,

Who is thoroughly trained for the purpose. The sagacity of this Horse is truly wonderful.

CLOWN to the HORSEMANSHIP---By Mr. DURANG.

Still Vaulting, or a Trial of Skill, over a single Horse---By Mr. Ricketts and Mr. Durang.

Mr. Ricketts will ride with Master Hutchins on his shoulders, in the attitude of

A FLYING MERCURY.

A variety of other exercises, both Novel and Pleasing.

THE WHOLE TO CONCLUDE WITH

The Taylor's Disaster ;

Or, Johnny Gilpin's Journey to Brentford---By Mr. Durang.

Doors to be opened in future at five o'clock, and the Performance to begin precisely at six.

Days of Performance---Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays.

Tickets may be had at the City-Tavern, at the Circus, and at Barber & Southwick's Book-store.

BOX 8/- PITT 4/-

The rider may have seemed awkward only because he had to confound attempts to stifle voting. A periodical pictured exactly that situation. The House of Commons expelled Wilkes in 1769, then voided two re-elections, and when he won yet again, it seated his opponent anyway. Seeing injustice, a new satirical magazine, *Town and Country*, published a print of a rider-less horse winning the "Brentford Sweepstakes." Just as crowds at the election had chanted "No liberty, no King," this cartoon named the winning horse "Wilkes Liberty." The print showed the horse coming in first but authorities disqualified the mount because it had no one mounted, the rider having fallen off. Like the tailor who sought to vote for Wilkes, and like Wilkes himself, this rider was thwarted trying to express the people's voice. Banners right and left on the print, "Vox Populi" and "Magna Carta and Bill of Rights," reinforced the message. In visual terms: no "Liberty."¹⁰ Later, Wilkes' stature as a fighter against oppression would inspire the actor Junius Brutus Booth. Himself named for a foe of tyranny, Rome's Brutus, he named a son after this new foe of tyranny, Wilkes, and that son John Wilkes Booth persuaded himself he was a foe of tyranny when he assassinated Abraham Lincoln.

Billy Button became a more common title than *The Tailor's Ride*, and eventually a 19th century byword for comic riding. The name came from a 1778 play, ten years after Astley's first show and fifteen years before Ricketts'. The play featured a "tailor" symbolically named "Billy Button." The joke of the play was a standard one, a newly wealthy man trying to rise in society by presenting himself as a gentleman. In England's fixed class structure, an attempt to scramble up the social ladder would have been innately ridiculous. Still, Americans also got the joke, even as they had begun to broadly, democratically apply the upper-class labels of "gentleman" and "lady" to themselves. *Billy Button* became so popular that speculation spies a short step to the century's new term for the navel, "belly button."¹¹ Fittingly, a "button" is also the punch line of a comic routine.

Adding to this fellowship of fabric, the English poet William Cowper introduced another cloth-related reference. In

A bill for a later Ricketts' performance, including The Taylor's Disaster.

Broadside, Popular Entertainment Collection,
Harvard Theater Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University

enjoyed the joke of bad riding.⁹ That comic crux continued to amuse people even as memory of the particular election faded, especially in far-off America. Nor was mockery the only interpretation. The act could also be seen as a triumph of the people, a representative rider defying difficulties to support his hero. From that perspective, the bumbling may not have been incompetence. The tailor could have been so eager to vote that he didn't care how he looked as long as he arrived in time. Interference was another possible angle.

BILLY BUTTON'S JOURNEY TO BRENTFORD AND BACK



Many Billy Buttons: circus act, political statement, social aspiration, play, song, maybe anatomy, medal—and cartoon.

19th century British letterpress engraving, Richard Flint Collection

1782 he published a comic ballad about a draper, “The Diverting History of John Gilpin Shewing how he went Farther than he intended, and came safe Home.” Apparently based on an actual event, it sang of a rich purveyor of linen who lost control of his horse, then lost hat and wig in a frenzied ride miles past his destination, before the horse turned and passed it again on a dash back to the stable. An 1878 edition of Cowper’s ballad was illustrated by Ralph Caldecott; his scene of the wild ride now shines on the obverse of the Caldecott Medal, awarded since 1937 to illustrators of children’s books.¹²

Ricketts did not perform the *Taylor’s Ride* early in his Philadelphia stand, but when attendance dipped, he introduced it to lure customers back. On June 29, 1793, he gave it possibly the longest title ever: *The Taylor Riding to Brentford Election, Or, Johnny Gilpin’s Journey on the Hunter and Rode-*

Horse. (“Rode” here meant road rather than field riding, and a hunter is a horse, of course.) Ricketts shortened his title a week later to *Johnny Gilpin, in Stile* (style), and for the stand’s final performance, simply *Taylor’s Journey*. The following year Ricketts temporarily swerved from these men of the (secular) cloth to the *Sailor’s Fox Hunting Voyage*, sailors also considered comically bad riders.¹³ More tailor-related titles tumbled along: *The Apprentice No Horseman*, *Canadian Postilion* in Montreal, *The Tailor’s Disaster*, and, joining ridicule to anti-English sentiment before the War of 1812, *The English Tailor*. A couple performed *Mr. and Mrs. Button’s Journey to Brentford*. In a French variation, the act became *Mr. Rognolet’s Journey to London*. Rognolet echoed the act’s title in France, *Rognolet et Passe-Carreau*, with “passe-carreau” as French slang for tailor. A variation emphasized the clash between man and horse, *Le Combat du Tailleur et*

son cheval. Another title, *The Unaccountable Sagacity of the Taylor's Horse*, reinforced what crowds particularly enjoyed, the horse's triumph.¹⁴

The act's popularity made it shorthand for comedy, and Charles Dickens noticed. In his 1854 novel *Hard Times*, America's favorite author other than Shakespeare crafted the circus proprietor Mr. Sleary in "his favourite character of Mr. William Buttons, of Tooley Street, in 'the highly novel and laughable hippo-comedietta of The Tailor's Journey to Brentford.'" ¹⁵ Others occasionally added that "s" to make it "Buttons." *The Atlantic Monthly* looked fondly back at the country's early years, just as the country was about to explode at Fort Sumter.

Of all the reminiscences connected with the illegitimate drama that have dwelt with me from my early childhood until now, not one is more vividly impressed upon my memory than that standard old comedy on horseback performed by circus-riders long since gone to rest, and entitled 'Billy Buttons's Journey to Brentford.' The hero of this pleasant horse-play was a tailor – men following that useful

trade being considered capable of affording more amusement in connection with horses than any others, excepting, perhaps, jolly mariners on a spree.... How cheerful my feelings, when that man of shreds and patches fell prostrate in the sawdust, where he lay groveling until the next revolution of his noble steed, when the animal caught him up by the baggiest portion of the trousers and carried him round the arena as a terrier might a rat! But, oh, what mingled joy and admiration, when out of the worried mass of coats leaped the nimble rider, now no longer a miserable tailor, but a roseate young man in tights and spangles, featly posturing over all the available area of his steed, and 'witching the world with noble horsemanship'!¹⁶

That "witching the world," a quotation from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, was apt, as circus riding, including comedy, had been bewitching the world since Ricketts.¹⁷

To be effective, the act required a rider skilled enough to make bumbling look credible, a horse smart enough to play its part well, and audiences savvy enough to recog-



An illustration from Charles Dickens' 1854 *Hard Times*, of children sneaking a peek in a circus, maybe at the act he labeled *The Tailor's Journey*.

Charles S. Reinhart wood engraving from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, American Household Edition, 1876, p. 123

nize the skill and sagacity. That collaboration propelled the popularity of circus past early uncertainty and into American folklife, probably experienced by more people than any other national institution before the Civil War.

After the war, the *Atlantic Monthly* used the act to take another look back, with its title, *The Hunted Tailor*; possibly an echo of the war's carnage. Nostalgia had long been an element of circus accounts but circus had changed. Or rather what people told themselves about circus had changed. The Gilded Age ignored decades of boisterous adult pleasure to flip to a new narrative of circus as tame and unsophisticated fare for children, with nostalgia now central to another new cliché, "children of all ages." The *Atlantic Monthly* reflected that flip. In the earlier account of 1861, the narrator had looked back fondly on his own innocent youth. In 1874 the narrator looked down on "two simple old men in the laugh at the mishaps of Billy Button." With circus now seen as unsophisticated, what had been a wild and genuinely funny act became little more than a "great relief" for simple people.¹⁸ **Bw**

Endnotes

1. An abridged list of sources on Astley includes Antony Hippisley Coxe, *A Seat at the Circus* (1951, Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980), pp. 28-32 and 124; George Speaight, *A History of The Circus* (London: Tantivy Press, 1980), pp. 31-33; Stuart Thayer, *Annals of the American Circus: 1793-1860* (Seattle, Washington: Dauven and Thayer, 2000), pp. 1-14 [this volume combines Thayer's three original *Annals*, with assistance by William L. Slout]; Dominique Jando, *Philip Astley and the Horsemen Who Invented the Circus* (n.p.: Circopedia Books, 2018); and Steve Ward, *Father of the Modern Circus 'Billy Buttons': The Life and Times of Philip Astley* (Barnsley, England: Pen & Sword History, 2018). While most agree on the 1768 date, Jando calls Astley's first two years "the draft of a circus," and situates the start of circus in 1770, Jando, *Astley*, pp. 30 and 32-36.
2. A. H. Saxon, *Enter Foot and Horse: A History of Hippodrama in England and France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 30-34; Charles Philip Fox and Tom Parkinson, *The Circus in America* (Waukesha, Wisconsin: Country Beautiful, 1969), p. 66; Thayer, *Annals*, pp. 1 and 10; Speaight, "Some Comic Circus Entrees," *Theatre Notebook*, p. 32 (1978) and p. 24; Speaight, *History*, pp. 111-112; *Pennsylvania Packet*, Aug. 24, 27, and 31, 1785, p. 3.
3. Thayer, *Annals*, p. 66; other troupes, p. 71; other claims, p. 73, fn. p. 41.
4. Astley's original "clowning" may have been riding, with no clown till November 1769, Ward, *Father of the Modern Circus*, p. 40.
5. *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London), July 26, 1768, p. 1; July 28 and Aug. 13, 1768; and May 13, 1769, p. 1; monkey, Dec. 26, 1768, p. 1, and Dec. 27, 1768, p. 2. Also, Speaight, "Comic Circus Entrees," pp. 24-27; and Speaight, *History*, pp. 24-25.
6. Jando, *Astley*, p. 39; Marius Kwint, "The Legitimization of the Circus in Late Georgian England," *Past & Present*, Feb. 2002, pp. 174 and 76-77. "Maccaroni" was slang for fancy, especially English attempts to copy fashionable styles from the Continent, including pasta. Americans recognize the joke in "Yankee Doodle," the song about a Yankee who put a feather in his cap and called it macaroni.
7. Kwint, "Legitimization of Circus," p. 77.
8. Thayer, *Annals*, p. 130; one source blamed the fights on nationalism, in arguments between French speakers and Irish tailors. The tailor act may have been self-deprecation because Astley's cavalry unit of shopkeepers and tradesmen had been teased as a "regiment

- of tailors," Fox and Parkinson, *Circus in America*, p. 66; also Jando, *Astley*, p. 39.
9. Kwint, "Legitimization," pp. 77 and 108-09; Speaight, "Comic Circus Entrees," p. 25.
 10. *Town and Country* (London), Vol. 1, Apr. 1769, pp. 192-93. Arthur H. Cash, *John Wilkes: The Scandalous Father of Civil Liberty* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 204-236 and 248-254.
 11. Speaight, "Comic Circus Entrees," pp. 24-25, includes two prints; Thayer, *Annals*, p. 130. In Samuel Foote's play *The Maid of Bath* (London: John Wheble, 1778), this "Billy Button" declares he's worthy of high social position because he "has not sat cross-legged"—the tailor's posture—"these six years," p. 23. "Belly button" seems to be an ancient term, but did not appear in John Bartlett's *Dictionary of Americanisms* until 1877, the fourth edition (Boston: Little Brown, 1877).
 12. "The Diverting History of John Gilpin. Part 1," https://www.luiker-waal.com/newframe_uk.htm?/johngilpin1_uk.htm.
 13. *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, June 29, 1793, p. 4; *Federal Gazette*, July 5, 1793, p. 3; *Federal Gazette*, July 22, 1793, p. 2. For a 1797 instance, Thayer, *Annals*, p. 9. For Ricketts' September 20, 1794 opening in Philadelphia, he published the comic dialogue with the poor riding sailor, recorded in T. Allston Brown, "A Complete History of the Amphitheatre and Circus, from Its Earliest Date to 1861," *New York Clipper*, Dec. 29, 1860, p. 296, a serialized history that continued weekly through January 1861. James S. Moy, "Entertainments at John B. Ricketts's Circus, 1793-1800," *Educational Theatre journal*, p. 30.2 (May 1978), pp. 190-91.
 14. Saxon, *Foot and Horse*, pp. 30-34, including "Sagacity," Thayer, *Annals*, pp. 9-10; Postilion p. 25; *Hunted*, p. 87; Mrs., p. 47; *Rognolet*, p. 21. Thayer identified Postilion as a version of a different comic act, *Metamorphosis*, but the word referred to carrying mail, making it more likely to be another *Tailor's Ride*; *Disaster*, Moy, "Ricketts's Circus," p. 188; Jando, *Astley*, pp. 82 and 181. Jando speculates the French used "Rognolet" because it sounds funny, email to author, Apr. 26, 2020.
 15. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854, London: Penguin Classics, 1969), p. 56. (Book I, Ch. 3.) "Hippo" means horse, the source of "hippodrome track" where circus horses ran.
 16. "A Nook of the North," *Atlantic Monthly*, Mar. 1861, p. 356.
 17. *The Diary; or, Loudon's Register* (New York), May 14, 1793, p. 3.
 18. Ajax T. Lamon, "About A Barrel of Lard," *Atlantic Monthly*, Dec. 1874, p. 712.

About the Author

David Carlyon has written two award-winning books, *Dan Rice: The Most Famous Man You've Never Heard Of*, about the great clown of the 1800s, and *Education of a Circus Clown: Mentors, Audiences, Mistakes*, a Stuart Thayer Prize winner about a modern professional (the author). He has written about the Gettysburg Address; the circus influence on *Huckleberry Finn*; and Broadway producer David Stone. Currently, he is working on a new book, *Democracy and Circus*. He's a University of Michigan alum, fought wildfires in the West, graduated from Berkeley Law, spent three years as a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey clown, was an actor in New York, and served as a military policeman in the Army.





Ted Sato with his Crown Graphic Graflex camera, ready for action at Madison Square Garden, 1953.

photographer unknown

All of the photographs illustrating this article are from the Tegge Circus Archives in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

He was by no means a luminary in any way, yet he was respected as a virtuoso in his chosen field. There is a very good chance that most of the American public has seen his work in some format over the past 65-plus years, while never once ascertaining the face behind the lens of his Crown Graphic or Rolleiflex cameras. His work could be considered as important as that of any prominent photojournalist – the likes of Robert Doisneau, Dorothea Lange, or Robert Frank – despite the fact that his focus was relatively limited.

Through **TED SATO**

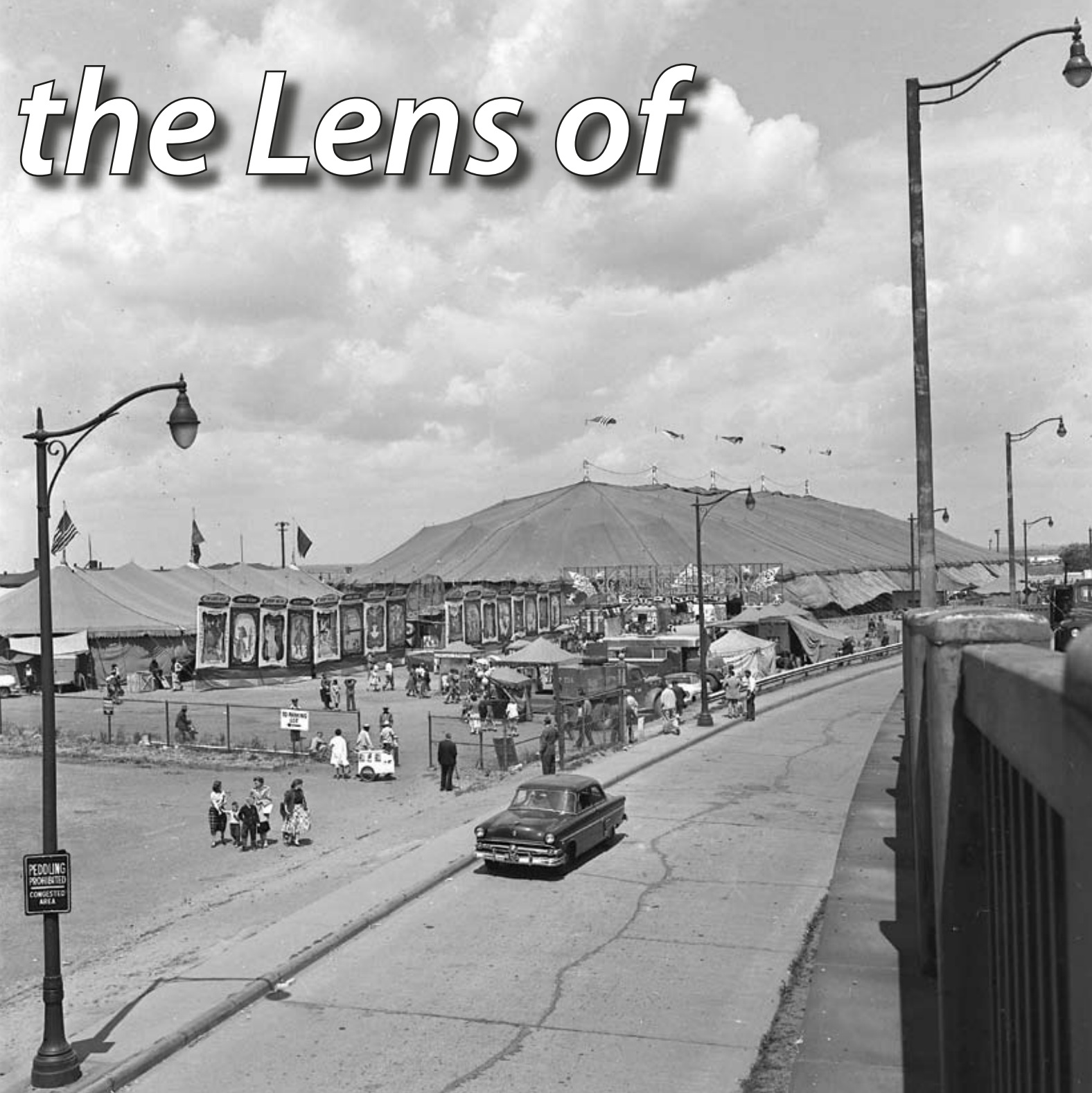
*A Colorful World
in Black & White*

by Timothy Noel Tegge



Sato's all-time "pride and joy" shot, taken in 1953, catches Trevor Bale's tiger Lucifer leaping through an illuminated hoop.

the Lens of



The Greatest Show on Earth in all its glory, on an unidentified lot along the 1954 route.

In his comparatively short-lived career as a salaried professional photographer (1953-1956), Ted Sato created some of the most memorable images linked to the final years of *The Greatest Show on Earth* under canvas, only a fraction of which have ever been previously revealed.

Shiro "Ted" Sato was the fourth child born to Japanese settlers Yonezaw Sato and his bride Tora Nitusta Sato, on October 25, 1923, in Rairden Station, Wyoming.^{1,2} Although specifics are almost impossible to accurately pinpoint, his

parents probably voyaged to the United States from Japan in the early 1900s, during a period of prolific immigration. "Between 1895 and 1908, approximately 130,000 Japanese" entered the U.S., settling primarily on the West Coast, where they worked as basic laborers in mines, logging camps, farming, and the railroad industry.³ In fact, the 1930 census shows that Ted's father worked as a foreman in the railroad industry.⁴ Ted spent his childhood and teenage years with his siblings around the family homestead, helping with ev-



Proclaimed "The Unchallenged Queen of the High Wire" in the 1955 program of displays, Josephine Beronini is pictured here inching her way back to the arena floor on an inclined cable.

everyday responsibilities while attending school in the immediate region.

At age 22, Ted joined the Army Reserves (infantry) on January 30, 1945, at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.⁵ United States World War II Army Enlistment Records note the term of "Enlistment for the duration of the War or other emergency, plus six months, subject to the discretion of the President or otherwise according to law." Citizenship status shows him as a U.S. citizen, with an education level of "4 years of high school" and as having a civilian occupation documented as "Unskilled construction occupations, n.e.c. [Not Elsewhere Classified]." That, in a nutshell, is really about all that is known about the military existence of Private Shiro T. Sato, serial number 37713344. With only minimal information recorded at his time of enlistment, along with the unfortunate loss of about 80% of Army discharge files from 1912-1959 (all lost in the catastrophic National Personnel Records Center fire of 1973 in St. Louis),⁶ this particular phase of Ted's life leaves much to the imagina-



Jose Tomas and his primate playmate Gargantua II appear inseparable in this compelling portrait, taken in late winter, 1956.



A perfectionist in every way, aerial director Vander Barquette closely scrutinizes the proficiency of Eileen Slater during a 1954 training session at winter quarters while other "North Starlets" watch closely.

tion. Coincidentally, a lack of information is somewhat of a recurring theme throughout the life and times of a man that many people fondly recall, but with not much detail.

Perhaps the search for post-war employment had something to do with Sato ending up on the Florida Gulf Coast. All we know is that shortly following his discharge from the military in 1946, Ted found himself in Sarasota, trying to juggle a work schedule as a short order cook and freelance photographer while attending art school. What little money he had was thinning out quickly, and inevitably he had to drop out of school to seek a more lucrative occupation⁷. A tip from a fellow classmate disclosed that the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, with its winter headquarters located on the (then) edge of town, was often looking for

Facial recognition is not always necessary when it comes to identifying certain performers, as proven by this photo of Felix and Amelia Adler, bound for Madison Square Garden's arena floor, c.1955.



help in various departments around its property, and so, with not much in the way of identifiable proficiencies, and even fewer credentials to back them up, off he went to seek employment.

I clearly remember visiting Ted and his second wife, Zelma Ruth, at their home in Sarasota in the spring of 1995 and asking him about the details of landing a job with "The Big One." It may have been then and there that I first decidedly realized Ted to be a man of few words.

"North hired me," he said.

"John, or Henry?" I questioned, thinking that would be an easy enough thing to confirm. But then I distinctly remember him answering, "I think it was Henry. But it may have been John. I think they were both there at the time."

Regardless of who explicitly cinched the deal, Sato did affirm that he was indeed hired by the Norths, but in the role of a personal aide and chauffeur to John and Henry's mother, Ida, the only sister of the seven original Ringling boys, who was living at the time on Bird Key



Choreographed by Edith Barstow, the 1954 Edition of The Greatest Show on Earth included a lavish equestrian production with an Old Mexico theme. Fiesta unfurled with a barrage of Spanish dancers, charro trick riders and ropers, all leading up to the entrance of three principal dressage riders. This Sato photograph exemplifies the fine art of “selling it” – a visual crescendo of statuesque perfection.

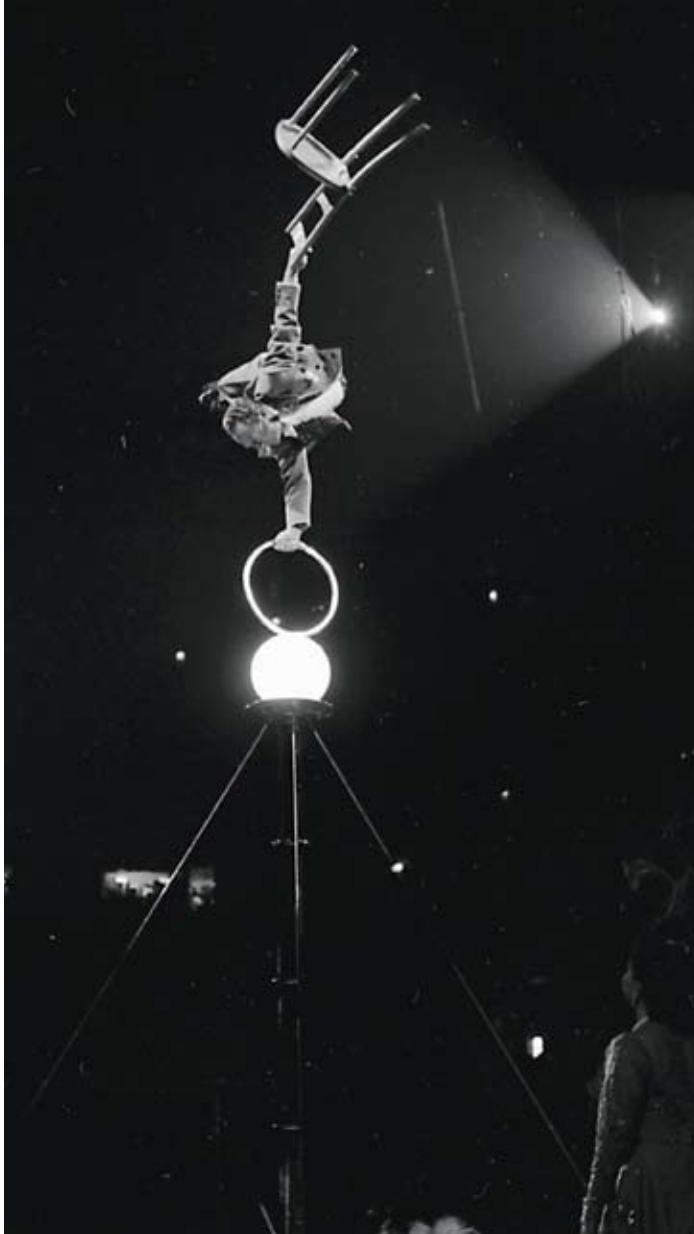
in Sarasota.

Jim “Dex” Dexheimer, a close friend of John Ringling North II and his wife Shirley, is the current caretaker of many North family documents. Graciously leafing through notes and letters at my request, he discovered that whenever Ida made annual trips to Fort Thomas, Kentucky, to visit her daughter, Sally (Mary Salome Ringling North), she was always accompanied by her chauffeur. In a handwritten letter to her son “Buddy” (Henry Ringling North) – undated but believed to be from late May or early June 1950 – Ida not only mentioned Ted’s presence, but also indicated that he resided on the Bird Key property as well. Dex also quotes Randolph “Duck” Wadsworth, Jr., one of Ida’s three grandchildren, who noted that “Ted was much more than a chauffeur. He was Ida’s personal assistant; he was her companion. He was much more a part of the family. When Ida would visit Sally, Ted was always with her.” Ted also escorted Ida to and around the circus whenever she visited the show.⁸

Duck specifically recalled buying a new camera in 1946 when he was about eleven years old. When Ted brought Ida around on

The earliest known photo of Shiro “Ted” Sato linked to the circus, picturing him behind the bar on John Ringling North’s private car, the Jomar, c.1950.





Exhibiting unimaginable feats of stability atop a luminous globe, the great Unus (Franz Furtner) kept audiences spellbound. Sato's portrayal of Furtner's agility is its own superb balance of shadows and light.

retreat, he set up a darkroom in their third-floor bathroom and taught Duck how to develop and print film. The following summer, Ted showed him how to use an enlarger. "Ted was already an accomplished photographer by the time he was hired [by the Norths], and he was freelancing as a photographer," Duck said.⁹

John Ringling North II remembers "Teddy" cooking breakfast in the *Jomar*. "Teddy was very kind to my grandmother," he reflected. "I believe she wasn't always very easy to get along with, so John [Ringling North] and my dad [Henry Ringling North] were so fond of Teddy because he took care of her. After she died [on December 21, 1950], John and my dad gave Teddy a job, as they appreciated his care of Ida."¹⁰

At the time of her passing, Ted had saved up enough money to allow him to return to school and pursue his study



A playful spur-of-the-moment pose. Ted Sato's lens focused many times on shapely Evy Gustafsson during the 1954 and 1955 seasons.



A painted smile belies reflective thoughts on the face of clown Jimmy Armstrong, waiting for the show to begin.



Pinito made an impressive entrance for her appearance in the Rocket to the Moon aerial production in 1954.

Above, Ringling's aerial ballet Butterfly Lullaby at Madison Square Garden was composed of a legion of "lovely lissome lassies aloft," as billed in the 1952 souvenir program. Pinito Del Oro can be seen perched atop her trapeze bar in the center of all the commotion.

of photography, and with the unexpected blessing of continuing employment around the circus, that winter of 1950-1951 must have been quite gratifying for him.

The Ringling-Barnum route book for the season of 1952 divulges, on page 30, the first "in-print" documentation of Shiro T. Sato being on the circus payroll, listed as one of 30 porters under superintendent Charles Burslem.¹¹ Particular attention must be placed on the "in print" descriptor, however, for it is irrefutable that Ted had to be with the show in some capacity throughout the 1951 tour. His personal treasure trove of negatives and images alone helps establish this fact many times over. Although



The upper reaches of the arena or big top were home-sweet-home for Maria Cristina del Pino Segura Gómez, better known as Pinito Del Oro. Surrounded by darkness, she glistened in the spotlights of Sato's dramatic image like the shining star she was.

In a clever publicity photo staged at Ringling's Sarasota winter quarters in the winter of 1954, Pinito Del Oro combs through her tresses for a roving photographer. Closer examination reveals that nomadic shutterbug to be none other than director of publicity, Roland Butler.

there is little to no written documentation naming personal aides or private servants on the *Jomar* or elsewhere around the show, the assurance that Sato remained under the Norths' personal employment is fully credible.

Mary Jane Miller, who was a familiar face around the show from 1942 through 1954, said, "I remember seeing him around the lot all the time, but how early on, I don't recall. He was very quiet; always smiling and good natured, but not at all talkative."¹² Miller may have had better reason than most to remember Ted's existence, particularly after the 1952 season, as it was he who replaced her husband, Dick Miller, as the staff photographer for the show in 1953. "Dick didn't get along with the bigwigs on the show, especially Concello. They were constantly telling him what to do, where to be, etc. Kind of 'pushy.' At the end of the 1952 season, Dick





Flanked by scores of feathered showgirls and circus stars, Ringling's 1953 finale, Americana USA, culminated in the traditional elephant long mount.



took a town job as a photographer for the *Sarasota News*, and got off the road completely.” Mary Jane remained with the show for the 1953 and 1954 seasons before settling down to have a child in 1955.

The 1952 route book offers a charted beginning to Ted Sato’s paper trail with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. We know little about Sato’s daily routine on the lot or train, but many people on tour with the show frequently sighted him

Sato had an eye for the ladies, and in 1954, 540-pound sideshow attraction “Baby Thelma” Amand was no exception. As the sideshow talker would often bellow, “it takes a boxcar to lug ‘er, and ten men to hug ‘er.”



Otto Griebing squeezes in a backyard cigarette break amid entrances in the program.

wandering around the lot in countless cities along the itinerary, often with a camera in hand. His ability, if not downright instinct, to document pertinent moments of circus life on film eventually became known to the brothers North more than once or twice along the journey. Everyone was familiar enough with Ted's independent camera work, and when Dick Miller turned in his resignation, his replacement was conveniently an arm's reach away. John and Henry Ringling North christened Ted "official photographer, Ringling Bros. Circus" and a key figure in the Department of Publicity, directed by the one and only Roland Butler in the winter of 1952.

Sato churned out score upon score of images at both the Sarasota winter quarters and New York's fabled Madison Square Garden in the spring of 1953. Additionally, he shot countless publicity photographs throughout the approximate eight-month tour under canvas that followed, snapping his shutter candidly at whatever happened to grab his attention day after day. He set up a darkroom on the train, which allowed him to develop, enlarge, and print his work each night. His earliest work was shot primarily with a Crown Graphic Graflex camera, using 4 x 5" sheet film, generally preferred by press photographers of the day. Although roll film cameras were plentiful and common at the same time, and Ted did eventually shoot more habitually with a Rolleiflex 120 professional model, he still liked using a sheet film camera for the rapidity and ease of developing a couple of exposures for immediate use in a newspaper story. No enlargement was needed, because the contact print from the film negative was exactly two newspaper columns wide. I

once asked Ted how many photos he clicked off on an average day around the show, and his response was "anywhere from ten to sixty, depending." Depending on what, exactly? He didn't say.

In the midst of Ringling's near 40-day stand at Madison Square Garden, Sato captured what he would refer to for the rest of his life as his all-time "pride and joy" – a stunning image of Trevor Bale's tiger Lucifer, frozen in time, leaping through a hoop of illuminated light bulbs. It was reproduced on a full page of *The New York Enquirer* on Monday, April 20, 1953, and soon became one of the most recognizable press photographs used by *The Greatest Show on Earth* for many years thereafter. "He was a talented photographer, even though he had one eye that didn't look at you," chuckled John Ringling North II.¹³

By the time the 1953 season drew to a close, Sato had become a picture taking machine, popping up everywhere you might imagine and in places you would never contemplate, be it on the hippodrome track or on the catwalk of the Garden. Snap, snap, snapping away at elephants and clowns, aerialists and hand balancers – he didn't miss a beat. His performance shots were energetic; you could straightforwardly sense the commotion in every frame, and his candid images, exposing the quieter, more private side of the circus, were warm and soulful. Be it under canvas or in an arena, *The Greatest Show on Earth* was Ted Sato's playground, and



Alfonse DeJohnghe and his performing chimpanzees were a popular feature of the circus from 1954 through 1956.



Watching "The Big One" come to life was as much a spectacle as the performance itself.



Three full meals for a cast numbering more than a thousand were prepared by the dining department every day throughout the under-canvas tour. The kitchen staff is shown here preparing chicken.

he made the absolute most of it.

A consistent bounty of fresh new pictures emerged via Sato's lenses throughout 1954 and 1955. There were new faces and features appearing for the "First Time in America," as the magazine program would proudly proclaim. The "North Starlets" were annually re-costumed. Buntings, ring curbs, and parade floats were reimagined, and every last one of everything had to be photographed before the "Big One" hit the road. Then, along the route, there were numerous special charity events, visiting dignitaries, promotional tie-ins, and all kinds of other things that commanded photographic attention. From Vice President Richard Nixon and his family seated in the audience to Marilyn Monroe perched atop a pink elephant, Ted kept his cameras plenty busy, and his title had been elevated to "Official Photographer and Representative on Lot."

He was being mentioned in the pages of *The Billboard* from time to time, and his work was occasionally surfacing in *The New Yorker* and *People Today Magazine*, as well. All along the tour, Ted continued to make magic with his cameras, generating another extraordinary collection of pictures that best embodied the season's highlights and even a couple of its "lowlights," so to speak:



A quiet moment between shows finds Antoinette Bisbini Dover catching forty winks in the ladies' dressing room.

volumes of all published by the show – Sato's brilliant photography was beautifully showcased throughout.¹⁴

Ted kept busy at winter quarters between early January and late February 1956, revving up for another season. In addition to focusing his lens on high-stepping horses and wild beasts, he knocked out many lighthearted images depicting cavorting clowns and shapely showgirls draped in exquisite fashions. Those particular photographs may be the best representation of that last fragmented season of Ringling's under-canvas era, as they express the same gung-ho enthusiasm Betty Hutton displayed in the closing scenes of DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

All seemed copacetic. But before the show departed for New York City a few weeks later, a managerial upheaval abruptly reorganized big show staff. Among those numerous modifications was the termination of head train porter, Charles Burslem. He was replaced by Ted Sato, thereby promoting Sato to the position of an authoritative superintendent.¹⁵ Not bad for kid from Wyoming demonstrating "Unskilled construction occupations, n.e.c."

When Ringling opened at Madison Square Garden on

there was turmoil with labor unions in San Francisco, for instance, with aggressive picketers harassing show employees...an inkling of things to come? Nonetheless, when the 1955 route book for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey rolled off the presses – one of the most lavishly illustrated



A painted jungle décor was evident in this mid-day view of the outdoor menagerie that Ted Sato recorded with his camera during an under-canvas tour.



*A more than usual muddle of ropes, cables, riggings, and added lighting under Ringling-Barnum's big top during the 1951 filming of DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth* in Sarasota.*



April 4, 1956, the show was met with picketing by both the American Guild of Variety Artists and the Teamsters Union.¹⁶ The protests continued throughout the New York engagement and then followed the show to Boston. By the time the circus opened under canvas in Baltimore, things simply began falling apart. The show was not getting to the lot on time and matinees were cancelled left and right. There were derailments and breakdowns, and on July 1 there was a devastating blowdown that left the big top in shreds.¹⁷ In all the commotion, it is more than probable that Ted had little to no time for taking pic-

Sato's lens captured the precision of Evy Karoly's mid-air leap over a short piece of rope while performing on the back of a galloping horse in this 1955 photo taken at New York's Madison Square Garden.



A celebratory toast aboard the Jomar in honor of actress Dody Heath's birthday, candidly photographed by Sato through a doorway looking into the dining room of the car. North later composed a piece of music titled in her name.

tures, and what few he did manage to snap off were less than inspiring. His playground was quickly waning.

Ted told me that after the show closed in Pittsburgh and those who rode the train back to Sarasota finally arrived at quarters, everyone was expected to clear their belongings as quickly as possible. He dismantled his darkroom, gathered together the stacks and bundles of negatives and prints he had created over the years (thousands of them), put them in a few large boxes, and headed to the office to hand everything over to John Ringling North. North, according to Ted, exchanged a few brief words, shook his hand, and then pointed out his office window to a dumpster on the grounds, instructing Ted to simply put them in the trash when he left. "We won't need them anymore."

Ted scooped up the boxes, left the office, headed up to – and, more importantly, *past* – the dumpster, loaded the accumulated negatives and photos into the trunk of his car, and made his way back home. Those negatives, leftover photographs, and proof sheets were stowed away in Ted and Ruth's laundry room for nearly 40 years.

Without question, not everything Sato shot survived. The climate alone of a non-temperature-controlled Florida laundry room likely added to the deterioration of emulsion

and coatings of some of the film. What is more, individually trapped inside those non-archival waxed-paper-like glassine envelopes of the period (in which those negatives had been kept for decades), any unrinsed chemicals used in the developing process could have soured, causing the film to shrink, bubble, peel, or even melt. It is sad to ponder what may have been lost, but how incredibly fortunate it is that so much remains.

It is extremely difficult to estimate the exact number of images Ted produced from the winter of 1952 through mid-summer 1956. And there's no telling what he may have nonchalantly photographed in 1951 and 1952 – before he started getting paid to take pictures – or even earlier for that matter, whenever he drove Ida out to winter quarters for an occasional afternoon stroll about the grounds. Surely, he must have snapped his shutter tens of thousands of times, recording the people, places, animals, and everyday chaos that made Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey live up to its reputation as *The Greatest Show on Earth*. In the long run, it may have been just a job for him, a place in time along life's capricious passage. But to the world, Ted Sato left behind an invaluable compendium of historic images that provide a trip back in time to relive some of childhood's greatest moments.



Hollywood legend Charlton Heston enjoys a casual conversation with John Ringling North on the observation deck of the Jomar, parked at winter quarters in December of 1955. Heston was there to host the live television broadcast Christmas with the Greatest Show on Earth.



Pictured on the bandstand in 1953 with cornet in hand, Merle Evans kept the pulse of every performance in perfect check.



Though appointed to snap the most accessible images to represent the big show, Sato regularly indulged himself by shooting pictures with a more artistic and often romantic flair. This unique photo of baton twirler Billie Mahoney was taken in 1954 at Madison Square Garden. She is framed out by the underbelly of an elephant and backside of its handler, offering the viewer a look at the circus from a completely different perspective.

Epilogue

In early March of 1995, just before I headed out on the road with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, I visited Ted and Zelma Ruth at their home in Sarasota as I had done a few times previously. Before I left, Ted placed a box of negatives in my lap and with a heartening grin said, "I think you should probably take these along with you." And so, I did.

After Ted passed on in 1999, Zelma Ruth contacted me and said that Ted wanted me to have his scrapbooks and remaining circus photographs. I collected them later that year. **BW**

Endnotes

1. Elizabeth Hensley interview conducted by Timothy Tegge, Apr. 27, 2021.
2. Sarasota Herald-Tribune Obituaries, "Ted S. Sato," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, Apr. 26, 1999, p. 6B.
3. Emily Anderson, "Immigration," *Densho Encyclopedia* [online], 2020.
4. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, United States Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census, 1930.
5. United States World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946,

Shirto T. Sato: Records: Military, *FamilySearch.org*. [online], Jan. 30, 1945.

6. "The 1973 Fire," National Personnel Records Center, *National Archives* (online), 2019.
7. "Big Top Photographer," *The Pittsburgh Press*, June 27, 1954, p. 18.
8. Jim Dexheimer interview conducted by Timothy Tegge, May 4-7, 2021.
9. Ibid.
10. John Ringling North II interview conducted by Timothy Tegge, Apr. 24, 2021.
11. *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus 1952 Route Book*, Sarasota, Florida: Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, 1952.
12. Mary Jane Miller interview conducted by Timothy Tegge, Apr. 23, 2021.
13. John Ringling North II, op. cit.
14. *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus 1955 Route Book*, Sarasota, Florida: Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, 1955.
15. "R-B Widens Range of Staff Shuffle," *The Billboard*, Mar. 24, 1956, p. 64.
16. Richard Rogers, "Labor-Troubled Big Top Won't Fold, Chief Says," *Evening Star* (New York), May 22, 1956, p. A19.
17. George Brinton Beal, *Circus Log Book 1956 Edition: The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus*, Newsburyport, Massachusetts: The Call of the Calliope, 1956.



Laden with personalities from the television, radio and motion picture industries, the 1955 opening night of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's New York stand included the one and only Marilyn Monroe, riding atop a pink-tinted pachyderm. Never-before seen until now, this Ted Sato image depicts Hollywood's blonde bombshell awkwardly adjusting herself backstage, awaiting her grand entrance.



Turmoil amongst the Teamsters, American Guild of Variety Artists, and the management of The Greatest Show on Earth erupted along the 1955 tour. In early September, Sato's camera captured a group of aggressive picketers that hassled show employees on the lot of San Francisco's Cow Palace.



The man behind the magic. Ted Sato proudly displayed his favorite photograph at his Sarasota home in the spring of 1995.

About the Author

Timothy Noel Tegge is an internationally recognized showman, speaker and authority on the circus and its history.



photo provided by
Timothy Noel Tegge

He is the owner and curator of the Tegge Circus Archives. With holdings dating back to the late 1700s, the collection is comprised of tens of thousands of original lithographs, posters, photographs and other media, as well as hundreds of vintage costumes, props and artifacts. Since its founding in 1980, portions of this collection have been exhibited in museums and galleries across the United States and Canada; featured in television and motion picture productions; included throughout the pages of books and periodicals; and employed by researchers, authors and producers worldwide.

Highways of Hope

Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros.: 1937-1968 by Chris Berry

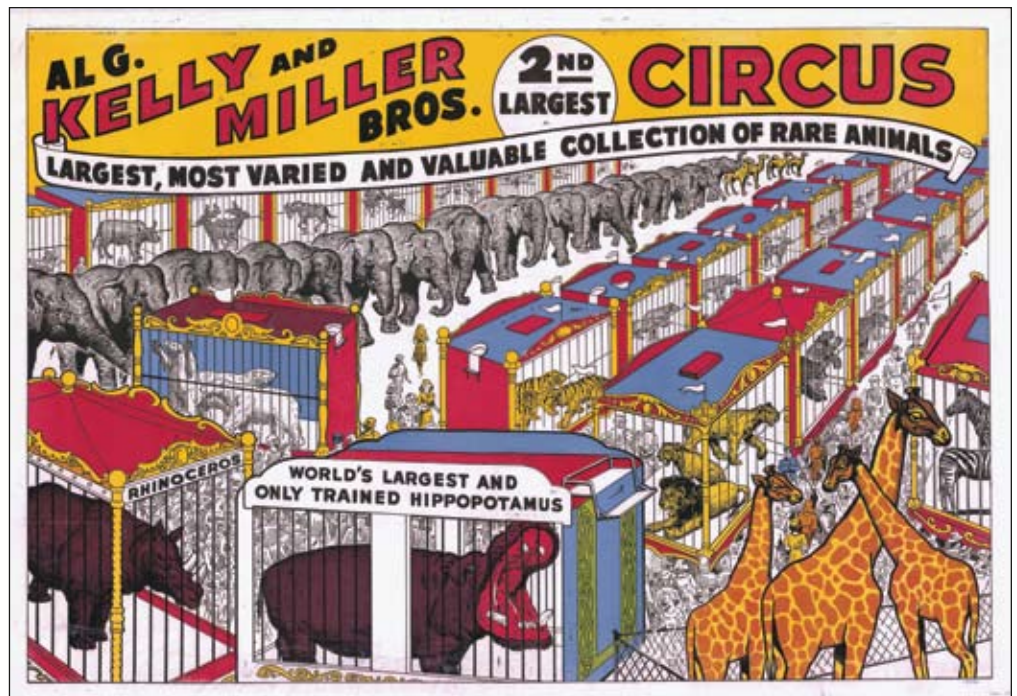
For decades the brightly painted trucks of Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. traveled the nation's heartland, bringing entertainment and exotic animals to small town America.

Library of Congress

The residents of Falls City, Nebraska were ready for a circus in the spring of 1951. For two weeks country roads leading into the small community of 6,500 had been transformed into a blaze of color as huge posters were pasted to the sides of barns and corncribs and carefully placed in downtown store windows.

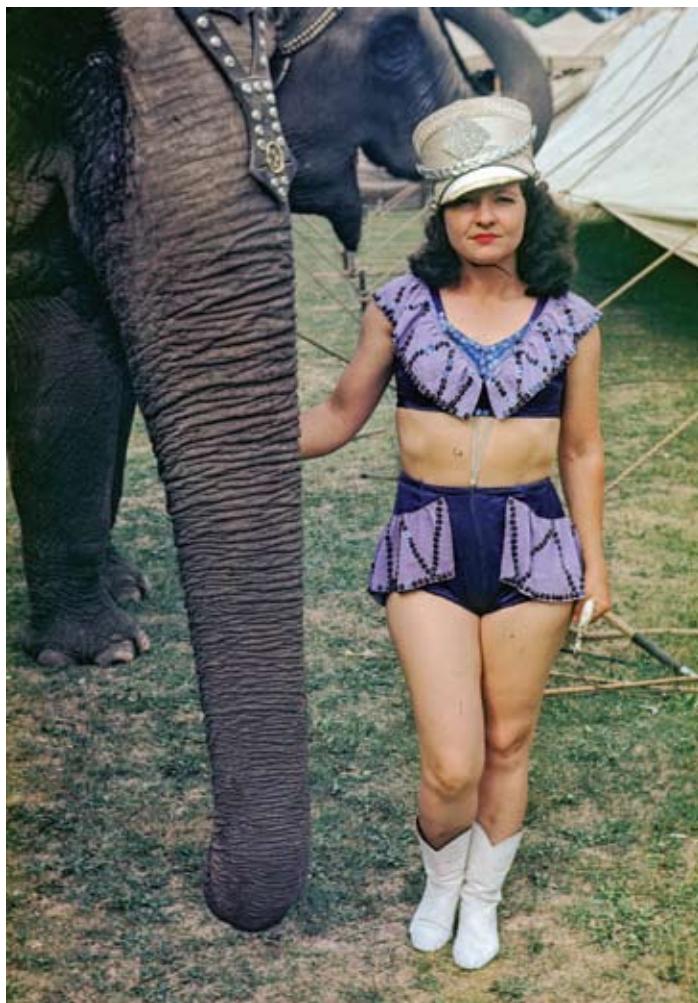
The Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus started the 1951 season on April 22, and only a month into the tour the convoy of Chevrolet trucks had already traveled from the show's winter quarters in Hugo, Oklahoma, through parts of Kansas and into the southeast corner of Nebraska, when the caravan rolled into the little town on the morning of May 25.

Those who attended the matinee that day saw a five-ring circus that included Babe Woodcock's performing dogs, Kay Colleano's



This custom designed poster was created by the Enquirer Job Printing Company to promote a traveling menagerie that included a hippopotamus, rhinoceros and a giraffe along with a herd of elephants. The jungle animals were a rare sight for those who lived many miles from the nearest zoo.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center



Isla Beach was a 15-year-old farm girl when she met D.R. Miller. She married him in 1934 and embraced the circus life as his partner for 64 years until her death in 1998 at the age of 81. Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

tightwire act, and elephants presented by both Bill Woodcock and Fred Logan, all performing to the thumping beat of Charlie Cuthbert's big top band.

They also saw a tug-of-war between a McCormick Farmall tractor and a three-ton elephant named Margaret, as well as a menagerie that included the "big three": a hippopotamus, a rhinoceros and a giraffe.

Among those performing that day was Bennie Rossi, a 12-year-old trick rider and roper who was featured in Tiger Bill Snyder's Wild West aftershow. More than 70 years later Rossi vividly described how a driving rain, accompanied by strong winds, swept over the showgrounds between performances.

"The lot was near a creek," he recalled. "That afternoon the wind came through like a tornado and literally picked up the big top and twisted it like a wash rag. The tent came down on top of several tall trees and we had to climb up the branches to pull the canvas down."¹

Needless to say, the show did *not* go on. The evening performance was cancelled, and everyone pitched in so that the circus could appear the next day in Clarinda, Iowa.²

"When something like that happened, you went to the

next town, put up sidewalls and hoped that it did not rain," Rossi said.

The blowdown in Falls City, Nebraska was one of countless challenges that the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus overcame as it traveled the United States in the mid-20th Century. During a short span of years, the circus developed into a big show that was welcomed into small towns, and in doing so it gave America's heartland a healthy helping of live entertainment and exotic animals.

Although circuses had been touring by truck since 1918,³ and showmen such as Andrew Downie, Charles Sparks and Claude Webb had successfully routed their shows over the nation's expanding network of highways, it was under the steady hand of Obert Miller, and his two sons, Kelly and Does, that the great American truck circus matured over three decades.

The Kelly-Miller circus was an impressively efficient operation that was deeply rooted in "high grass" America. While it mirrored many of the traditions of an earlier era, it also brought innovations to the showgrounds in the form of canvas spool trucks, multi-purpose semi-trailers, seat wagons and massive push-pole tents.

And for decades the Millers proudly embraced the title of *America's Second Largest Circus*.

Obert Miller got his first taste of show business growing up in Smith Center, Kansas where he sold tickets and popcorn at his father's opera house, but it was his love of animals that lured him to the circus.

After he trained his first pony act in the early 1920s, Miller quickly learned that he could book it into silent movie houses on nights when they were dark. Soon dogs were added to the routine and Miller began presenting his act on carnivals and other traveling shows.

In a profile that appeared in *The Billboard* in 1950, Miller said that it was during that time that he crossed paths with Al G. Campbell, a member of the original Campbell Bros. circus family from Fairbury, Nebraska. Miller said that for one season the two combined their little outfits before he struck out on his own in 1928.⁴

Those early years were difficult, and Miller said he did not make any money until 1929 when he said, "his luck turned." That was the winter the great trapeze artist Alfredo Codona took a circus to Mexico, and Obert Miller was hired to present his dog and pony act.

When Miller returned to the United States at the end of the tour, he found the nation in the grip of The Great Depression, yet despite the economic challenges of the time, he started his own circus in 1931.

"We called it Gentries' Dog & Pony Show," Miller recalled. "It was clearly an infringement on the Gentry Bros.' title."⁵

Appropriating the well-known name was not enough to attract an audience, however, and Gentries' Dog & Pony Show folded soon after it opened. Over the next several



Ben Rossi was born into a circus family and first appeared on Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. when he was still a toddler. Rossi became an accomplished trick-rider and roper at a very early age. His mother Mary later married Obert Miller, the founder of the circus.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

years Miller's act appeared on several small truck shows including Fletcher Fowler's circus in 1932 and 1933 and both the Beers and Barnes and Ferris & Short circuses in 1934. The following season he trouped with Atterbury Bros., and in 1936 he appeared with the Bud Hawkins Circus.

At the end of the 1936 season Obert Miller was in Springfield, Missouri with only a pickup truck, four ponies and a dream. His sons Kelly and Dorey soon joined him, and the ponies were booked for five weeks at Heer's Department Store during the Christmas season.

Dorey had saved \$125 working for the Seils-Sterling Circus the previous season, and with that nest egg the Millers began planning their own show. It was in a garage behind a filling station where they sewed a 40-by-70-foot tent and gathered the props and other essentials they would need for the coming season.⁶

The Miller Bros. Circus opened in Springfield, Missouri in March of 1937, and although the first stand brought a respectable crowd, the ticket prices of only 10 and 20 cents created a financial struggle that lasted for the remainder of the season.

Obert Miller recounted how every morning the three would unload the pickup truck at dawn, and while Kelly and Dorey (known to showfolks as either Dorey or D.R.) were

setting up the tent, Obert would drive to the next town to put up billing and contract the lot. He would then double back in time for the two-ring performance, which featured four ponies, four dogs and two monkeys, along with Dorey, billed as "Don Steele, The Hollywood Star on the Silver Wire." The entire program was presented by Obert, his sons and their wives.⁷

The Miller Bros. Circus of 1937 was routed into tiny villages from Missouri to South Dakota, and each afternoon as showtime approached, Dorey would play a small calliope in school yards to let the community know that the circus was in town.

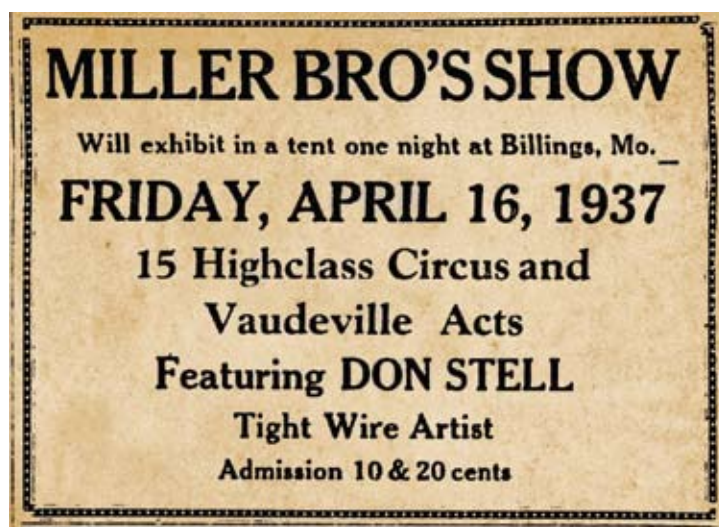
Dorey's daughter Barbara Miller-Byrd said those first performances were also promoted through an early form of social media – the telephone party lines that connected many of the rural homes at the time. "They would ring the common line and once everyone had picked up, they would tell them that the circus had arrived."⁸

It was the next season, 1938, when the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus was launched, and with it a formula for success that lasted for decades.

Obert Miller said the new title was chosen partly for necessity and partly for sentiment. Although many later suspected the name was created to generate confusion among audiences who thought that they might be seeing either the Al G. Barnes circus or the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch, Obert told *The Billboard's* Tom Parkinson that was not the case.

According to Miller, another family in Springfield had also started a Miller Bros. Circus, so a different title was needed. Obert said that while "Kelly" was his oldest son's first name, "Al G.," was a throwback to the season when he had been a partner with Al G. Campbell.⁹

The Kelly-Miller circus in the late 1930s was truly a family affair. Obert Miller was not only general manager, but



This newspaper advertisement appeared only weeks after the Miller Bros. circus premiered in the spring of 1937. In the early days Dorey Miller walked the tight wire billed as "Don Steele." His stage name was misspelled in this early ad.

also worked a liberty horse act. In addition to his tight wire act, Dorey performed on a single trapeze and appeared in a table rocking routine. At the same time he was in one ring, Dorey's new wife Isla was in the other, also on a trapeze along with a ladder and iron jaw act.

During those early seasons Kelly Miller handled the books, sold tickets and clowned while his wife Dale played a

tioned that while the show did not arrive on the lot until 1:15 P.M., the performance was underway only an hour and 15 minutes later.¹⁴

It was in 1938 that the Millers bought their first animals for a traveling zoo that eventually would become the largest carried by any circus. The Kelly-Miller menagerie started with the purchase of a lion for \$15.00 and a bear that cost



The Kelly-Miller circus was still a small mud show when it set up in Trenton, Nebraska on the morning of September 4, 1941.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center

calliope that was mounted in a small wagon.¹⁰

Years later Obert was quick to credit his sons, as well as their families for the show's success.

"Dores is the showman; Kelly, the mechanic," he explained. "I have been fortunate that the boys and their families stick with it."¹¹

According to D.R. and Isla's daughter Barbara, her grandfather should also be credited for running a tight ship. "In those early days he would give my parents 25 cents a week to spend on whatever they wanted. My dad would buy a cigar and my mom would buy a candy bar. Everything they earned went back into making the circus bigger and better."¹²

The investment soon paid off as evidenced by an early review which said, "While the circus was small, the performances were good, and those attending spoke very highly of the show."¹³

It was not only the solid performances that defined the young circus, but also the tenacity and spirit of the Miller family. Late in the 1938 season, *The Billboard* reported that a semi-truck driven by Obert had broken its radius rod near Quinton, Oklahoma. According to the report, although the truck had plunged down an embankment, both Miller and the stock survived without a scratch. The article also men-

\$30.00.¹⁵

That winter the circus returned to Springfield, Missouri where on December 3 the building that housed some of the animals and equipment caught fire. Dorey Miller braved the flames to rescue the animals and was burned in the process. Despite his injuries he saved the show's lion along with four monkeys, several dogs and a few other animals. Unfortunately, the bear was lost, along with several hundred yards of new canvas and lumber. The damage was estimated at about \$2,000, and the equipment and animals were not insured.¹⁶

Still the circus continued to grow, and soon the Millers were eager to acquire an elephant. Fortunately, there were quite a few on the market in the late 1930s.

After Hagenbeck-Wallace folded in 1938, its equipment and animals were moved to the vacated Al G. Barnes quarters at Baldwin Park, California. According to elephant trainer and historian Buckles Woodcock, when Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was in Southern California the following season, John Ringling North added 12 of the best animals to his show and nine of the less-desirable elephants were sent to Louis Goebel's Lion Farm in Thousand Oaks.

"D.R. once told me that when they heard that elephants were for sale, he and Obert took off for California in their biggest truck," Woodcock recalled. "When they arrived, D.R.

said he was terrified since they all looked so big and dangerous. Obert then explained to keeper Cheerful Gardner that they had a small family show in Oklahoma and little experience with elephants.

“Cheerful walked them down the line and said, ‘Here is an old cow that won’t give you a minute of trouble!’ For \$600 the Millers bought ‘Hattie,’ their first elephant.”¹⁷

For two seasons Hattie was a major attraction, billed as “The Largest Performing Elephant in America.”¹⁸ A second elephant, “Mena,” was acquired near the end of the 1941 season for \$500, only a few weeks before Hattie died. The Millers soon acquired another elephant



This photograph was taken in Trenton, Nebraska on June 7, 1939. During the show's pioneer seasons Dorey Miller would play the air calliope in school yards on circus day and Kelly's wife Dale would provide musical accompaniment during the performance.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center



named Tena who remained with the show until 1964.¹⁹

An article from the Wheaton, Missouri newspaper in the spring of 1939 was typical of the stories that would appear in advance of the Kelly-Miller's arrival. “This is truly a big circus,” the article promised, as it described the two-ring performance. “There will be funny clowns, pretty girls, beautiful horses and tiny ones.”²⁰ Admission to the circus was now 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children.²¹

The Millers spent three winters in Springfield prior to briefly relocating their quarters to Joplin, Missouri and then to Mena, Arkansas. It was after the show left Mena in the spring of 1941 that Vernon Pratt, a prominent businessman from Hugo, Oklahoma, coaxed the Millers to winter in his community.

Pratt promised a free place for the show to stay, along with electricity and water. In exchange the Millers were to provide a public performance every Sunday while the circus was in winter quarters.²²

It was an offer they could not refuse, and soon after the Millers settled into Hugo it became the winter home for many performers and several other circuses.

The winter of 1941-42 coincided with the United States' entry into World War II, and like other traveling shows Kelly-Miller faced gasoline and tire rationing. Despite many wartime challenges, the circus continued to tour, even after

Horses were always an important part of circuses produced by Obert Miller. This stock lithograph was printed by the Ackerman-Quigley firm of Kansas City, Missouri and used to promote the circus early in its history.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

D.R. joined the army in February of 1943.²³

The Miller brothers' wives, Dale and Isla, were given new responsibilities during the war, including driving circus trucks from town to town. Isla Miller recalled that her brother-in-law gave her one lesson and some advice. "He said if you drive 50 miles an hour you won't have to shift on the hills. But I soon found out you could not go through town that fast!"²⁴

After the trucks were spotted on the lot, the women would help set up the show, prepare meals in the cookhouse and take tickets, "we only had one half-hour a day when we did not have anything to do," Isla recalled.

During the performance many of those who admired the women on the trapeze or presenting a pony act would likely be astonished to realize that the glamorous girls in their sequined costumes were actually the same truckdrivers who had arrived in town that morning dressed in overalls with their hair tucked under a bandana.

The shortage of working men meant that local youngsters had to be recruited to help set up the circus. A few days before the show would arrive, advertisements appeared in local newspapers which sought "25 Kids to Work for Passes." The ads also emphasized that on circus day the work began

at 6:00 A.M.²⁵

A typical wartime performance was reviewed by the newspaper in Emerson, Nebraska, where 600 people attended the show in the summer of 1942.

"The American Legion, which sponsored the circus, found its officials to be honest, fair and pleasant to deal with. Almost everyone enjoyed the various events at the two-ring performance in the large tent, but had little to say about the sideshow, which preceded it, feeling no doubt that they expected at least a little more for their money. The Legion received a little over \$20 for sponsoring the event, this representing 10 percent of admissions to the big tent."²⁶

During the war Obert Miller was a constant presence on the lot, and those who visited said it was difficult to distinguish the boss from his workers as he laid out the circus and helped put up seats. Once the show was set, Obert would watch the performance with the locals where he easily blended in with the crowd of farmers and small-town circus fans.

By 1943 eight trucks were needed to carry the 750-seat big top from town to town along with a menagerie that included five elephants, a lion, a leopard and a bear. The circus also carried 17 horses, five dogs, a camel and a midget cow.



D.R. and Isla Miller were photographed with their daughter Barbara when Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. was in Darlington, Wisconsin September 6, 1948. Barbara grew up on the circus, and after attending the University of Oklahoma she and her husband Geary Byrd operated the Carson & Barnes Circus until 2017.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections



Evalina Rossi was featured on the circus for many years and was the stepdaughter of Obert Miller. She was performing on the trapeze in 1945 when the big top collapsed during a severe storm.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

Music for the two-ring circus was provided by a calliope, and admission to the big show was now 50 cents for adults, 30 cents for children.²⁷

As amazing as it may seem, for the first seven years the Millers sewed all of the canvas used on the show.²⁸

When the circus was in winter quarters in 1944 a tornado skipped through Hugo injuring five people, destroying five homes and causing about \$10,000 damage to Miller's winter quarters. The twister destroyed seven of the show's eight semi-trucks, and although the strong winds did not damage the elephant barn, another building was hit and several animals from the menagerie briefly escaped from their cages.²⁹

Throughout its history the circus inevitably traveled each spring and summer through the region of the Great Plains described by weather forecasters as "Tornado Alley," so it should come as no surprise that the Kelly-Miller route often intersected with that of Mother Nature, who frequently appeared "day-and-date" in all her fury.

"I remember many times watching the side poles and center poles dance as I was trick-riding," Ben Rossi recalled. "I just wanted to get out of the tent before it came down."³⁰

That is exactly what happened in Lexington, Nebraska on the evening of June 27, 1945 when Bennie's sister Evalina Rossi was performing on the trapeze during a violent thunderstorm.

"I was standing in the backdoor worried

about her because I knew that the tent could collapse at any time," he recalled. "I was watching her hanging by her heels, and the moment that she grabbed the trapeze with her hands the lights went out and the whole tent came down."

Rossi remembered the pandemonium that night as he frantically searched for his sister while people fought their way from under the canvas in a driving rainstorm. "I found her about 15 or 20 minutes later as I was walking around the stake line," he said. "She had just placed her hands on the trapeze when the tent came down and she landed on some people sitting in the reserved seats. Fortunately, she only hurt her back."

Several spectators were injured in the Lexington, Nebraska blowdown, but remarkably no one was killed.³¹

"A blowdown was a terrible thing for a circus," said Barbara Miller-Byrd. "Everybody would get out and sew the canvas to try to get it back in the air as soon as possible. Our job as children was to take the needles to those who were sewing the

canvas so that they did not have to stop working, even for a minute. Before long I learned the baseball stitch and I got promoted."³²

On the day that World War II ended, the show was making its annual trek through Nebraska, and D.R. Miller soon returned from Europe with a spirit of innovation that defined his circus during the booming post-war era.

Among the 18 trucks that left Hugo in the spring of 1946 was one with a large spool mounted on its chassis, designed to roll and unroll canvas as it slowly made its way across



In 1946, D.R. and Kelly Miller designed a truck that was outfitted with spools to roll and unroll canvas for the show's tents. It was the first time that a truck circus used the mechanism to assist with the setup and teardown of the big top.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center



Obert Miller purchased his first elephant in 1939 and over the next 60 years more than 200 of them passed through the hands of his son D.R. The six elephants that Kelly-Miller purchased from Art Concello in 1946 appeared in the motion picture *Tarzan and the Huntress*.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center

the showgrounds. Although spool wagons had been used on railroad circuses in the early 20th Century,³³ the mechanism designed by D.R. and Kelly Miller was the first ever used on a motorized circus.³⁴

The spool truck was just one of the new concepts that D.R. Miller envisioned. Decades after his death, Barbara Miller-Byrd remembered how her father dreamed up new ideas. "The circus was his whole world and he lived it 24 hours a day," she said. "He had a big desk, and he would sit there for hours making crude drawings of different ideas that he had. They did not always work but most of them were successes."

One of his ideas was to convert two army surplus buses into sleepers before the start of the 1946 season. The buses were acquired about the same time that the show purchased six elephants from Art Concello.³⁵

Before the elephants were shipped from California, D.R. accompanied the small herd to the RKO studios where they appeared in the film *Tarzan and the Huntress*. When Dorey returned from Hollywood, he brought along several more animals including a camel and a bear.³⁶

The menagerie was heavily promoted, and in 1948 a giraffe was added to the collection, the first of her kind to be successfully transported by a truck show. Another addition that season was a two-year old hippopotamus acquired from the Memphis Zoo. The Millers named the hippo Miss Oklahoma.

By the late 1940s the Kelly-Miller circus was moving on 33 show-owned trucks, of which 27 were semis. Among the new vehicles were two special trucks built specifically to carry the latest acquisitions for the menagerie, a polar bear

and a black rhinoceros.

Shirley Lindemann Barta had grown up around various circuses and she spent her youth traveling with Kelly-Miller, joining the show when she was seven years old. "People in those rural areas were not accustomed to seeing those animals," she said. "They may have seen a picture in a book, but it was quite amazing for people in the country to see a giraffe or hippo, and there was nothing as impressive as seeing all of those elephants doing the long-mount."³⁷

The menagerie was only part of what impressed the Circus Historical Society's Bill Green when he visited the show in the summer of 1949.

"We have never seen anything on trucks that can equal it," Green wrote in *Hobby-Bandwagon*. "The show could pass for a railroad circus with its long well-lighted midway, flashy double decker bannerline and beautifully decorated wagons."

The review then detailed "the strongest and most well-balanced performance that the Millers have ever offered."³⁸

Not everyone gave the show such a glowing review however, and when the show played Maryville, Missouri that summer the local newspaper grumbled about the candy pitch, reporting that it was delivered by "the highest-pressure guys in the world."

The reporter then told the story of watching a seven-year-old as his parents explained to him that the prizes in the candy boxes had no real value. When one of those in the next seat emptied a box and was rewarded with only a cheap plastic ashtray, the little boy blurted out, "just sucker stuff;" repeating what he had heard his father say moments before.³⁹



For decades, Kelly-Miller billposters decorated small town America with enormous showings of colorful posters, an effective way to advertise in communities that lacked daily newspapers or local radio stations. Chris Berry Collection

Money was flowing from both the candy pitch and ticket sales in 1949, and when the last truck rolled off the fairgrounds in Berryville, Arkansas on the night of October 19, Kelly Miller and his wife Dale were the only ones left on the lot.

According to Kelly Miller, as they were packing up, a Cadillac pulled onto the lot and three men jumped out. Miller told police he and his wife were pistol whipped and tied up before the men stole \$5,000 in five-dollar bills and about 11,000 one-dollar bills. Before fleeing they also took two diamond rings from Dale Miller. Although the Arkansas state police searched the backroads of Carroll County, the bandits were never found, nor was the \$16,000 recovered.⁴⁰

As the new decade dawned, the circus began a tour that led the show outside of its familiar territory and eastward across Indiana and into Michigan and Ohio before circling south into Louisiana and Texas.

Business was reportedly good when the show entered Indiana, but expenses were increasing. According to Obert Miller, it cost about 15-percent more to operate the show in 1950 than it had the previous year. Miller hoped to squeeze out a few more dollars by tacking two additional weeks to the end of the season, and by the time the circus rolled into winter quarters on December 4, the show's 35 trucks had traveled nearly 11,000 miles. The eight-month season was the longest and most extensive tour to date.⁴¹

Kelly-Miller was not the only show that faced financial challenges in 1950 and when Dailey Bros. closed that season Obert Miller picked up Ben Davenport's seven camels,



Obert Miller was a shrewd businessman who created a big show for small town America.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center



Although the Kelly-Miller circus never had a large clown alley, Irving Romig, seen here in 1948, was among those who generated laughs from the rural audiences.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

adding more exotic animals to his burgeoning menagerie. Three semis were now required to transport the show's 14 elephants, not to mention the additional vehicles needed to carry 70 horses and ponies, along with a hippo, rhino, tapir, ostrich and giraffe, plus a polar bear, lions and tigers.

Unlike many other circuses, the menagerie was not a free attraction on Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. The animals were presented in the sideshow tent and required an additional 25 cents for admission. Tickets to the main performance in 1951 cost \$1.25 for a reserved seat and 75 cents for general admission. The show ran for an hour and 45 minutes.

When the performance ended and the crowd exited the evening performance in the 1950s, they could not help but notice that the sideshow bally stage had been repositioned to the center of the midway. As Charles Weathersby's sideshow band played Dixieland jazz, two women would dance on the stage to promote "The Midnight Ramble," the final "blow-off" attraction before the circus moved to the next town.

Although the spiel promised a titillating performance, what was actually presented in the "annex" was relatively tame by 21st Century standards. "I guess in those rural communities it was a nice little outing for the farmers," Ben Rossi said, adding, "but the girls actually wore much more than what you see on the beach today."⁴²

While Kelly-Miller rarely strayed from small towns, it occasionally made headlines worthy of big city newspapers. Such was the case when the show was in Circleville, Ohio on August 10, 1951.

The circus' year-and-a-half old elephant, Barbara, had stepped on a rusty nail the previous day and trainer Bill Woodcock Sr. was concerned that she might contract lockjaw. Woodcock knew the young elephant needed antibiotics, so he summoned a local veterinarian to the showgrounds. Like most small-town vets, the doctor was more accustomed to handling dogs, cats and horses. He had never treated an elephant, but under Woodcock's guidance they found the best point of penetration for the big syringe.

After Barbara was laid on her side, dirt and dust were scrubbed from her head before the veterinarian struck the hypodermic needle as deep as he could behind one of her ears. After nine-million units of penicillin were injected into the elephant she suddenly became

excited and jumped up, startling all of those in attendance. Eventually Colonel Woodcock coaxed her into laying down again, and the vet injected one million units of anti-tetanus serum behind the other ear.⁴³

Barbara recovered, and the circus received publicity in the form of headlines that preceded the show throughout its tour of Ohio.

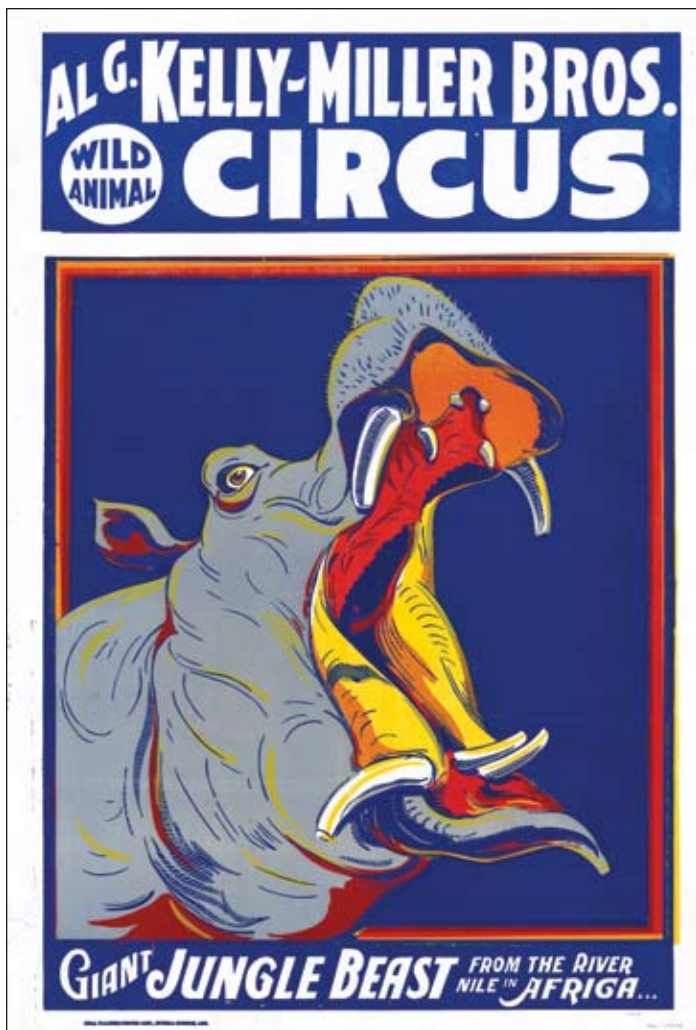
Still, the circus could not depend on free newspaper coverage, and although the billposters would generously paper each town, it was a stunt that D.R. Miller dreamed up in 1950 that created buzz for the remainder of the decade.

The circus was in Tipton, Indiana on September 2, 1950 when Miller took delivery of a small airplane.⁴⁴ "Dorey was intrigued by aviation," Ben Rossi recalled. "After he bought the plane, he wired it with a loudspeaker and hired a pilot to fly it from town to town."⁴⁵

On circus day the airplane would take off early so it could make its first pass over the community prior to 8:00 A.M. playing recorded music and announcing that the show had arrived. By 9:00 A.M. there was often a big crowd on the showgrounds watching the circus come to life.⁴⁶

"There were people everywhere," Sonja Barta recalled. "In every town hundreds would come to the lot."

The promotion caught the attention of the competition and when Kelly-Miller and Ben Davenport's Campa Bros. Circus were both routed into Winchester, Tennessee on the same day, the two shows fought a battle that had many of the characteristics of old-time opposition, but with a few new



This woodcut poster was created by the Neal Walters Poster Co. to promote Miss Oklahoma. The one sheet was used by the Kelly-Miller advance for many years.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center

twists.

According to *The Billboard*, Kelly-Miller's advance arrived in Winchester a week before Campa Bros. The Kelly-Miller billposters seized the best locations for posters and bought advertisements in the community newspaper. When the Campa agent arrived a few days later he purchased all the commercials on the small town's radio station. The only airtime that remained were the regularly scheduled programs sponsored by the Rotary and Lions Clubs.

As luck would have it, the two service clubs were the sponsor of Kelly-Miller, and both the Rotary Club and Lions turned their airtime over to the show. For one week, listeners to WCDT heard no local advertising other than commercials for the two circuses.

On Sunday September 30, the day before the two shows were scheduled to give their performances, Campa Bros. flew its own small airplane over the community, announcing that the circus had arrived

early, and an unscheduled performance would be given that day. The plane also dropped leaflets that included a free ticket to Campa Bros.

When word of the tactic reached Dorey Miller in nearby Manchester, he scrambled his airplane, and a promotional dogfight took place in the skies over eastern Tennessee as both circuses battled for airborne superiority.

According to *The Billboard*, the Battle of Winchester was a decisive victory for Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Although Campa Bros. drew a three-quarter house for its unscheduled Sunday performance, when both shows went head-to-head on Monday, Campa was forced to cancel its matinee as Kelly-Miller had to put down straw to accommodate the overflow crowd.

The decision by Campa Bros. to cancel its afternoon show, and the big audience for Kelly-Miller were attributed to the fact that the Rotary and Lions Clubs announced they would give their profits to the high school band. The sponsors had also arranged for schools to be dismissed early so school buses could take students to the Kelly-Miller matinee.

Both shows gave performances that Monday night, and although Campa Bros. reportedly had a fair turnout, Kelly-Miller again filled its big top.

Although Campa Bros. only toured in 1951, Kelly-Miller continued its airborne campaign for several years. While the show was in Arcadia, Wisconsin the following season the

Below, twice a day John "Camel Dutch" Narfski would walk "Miss Oklahoma" around the hippodrome track using nothing but a small stick to guide her. The veteran handler came to the United States in 1902 as part of Carl Hagenbeck's Trained Animal Show.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center



plane flipped over while landing near the showgrounds. The pilot was not injured, but about \$2,000 damage was done to the airplane, which was valued at \$6,000.⁴⁷

Despite the accident, the airborne promotions continued. By 1954, the show used two airplanes to advertise the show.

As the circus expanded in the 1950s it soon boasted of an eight-pole big top, and as it was throughout D.R. Miller's long career the new tent was put up using push poles rather than canvas that had to be laced to bale rings and hoisted to the top of the center poles.

"You could put it up faster," Ben Rossi said. "With the spool truck they would simply come in and roll the canvas out. While they were doing that the stake-drivers drove the wooden stakes as the side-poles were being put up. Then the elephant would come in under the side and pull up the quarter poles, and then the center poles. It went up very quickly."

The downside of the push-pole tent was that it was rough on the canvas. "When you were pushing those poles up what was hanging there was heavy canvas," Rossi recalled. "It tended to tear, especially when the canvas was heavy after a rainstorm."⁴⁸

The dome of a push-pole tent was also not as high as those that used bale-rings, which meant there were no flying

trapeze acts on the Kelly-Miller circus in the 1950s. Instead, the show featured The Murillo Troupe, a casting act with stationary bars that was presented over the hippodrome track. In the early 1950s the act featured Eddie Murillo as the catcher, along with fliers Victor Gaona and Eddie, Jr. in clown makeup.

Throughout the 1950s the route expanded into new territory, and in 1953 the show moved as far east as Pennsylvania and West Virginia. When the circus was in Wilmington, Ohio on June 9, the skies darkened during the matinee performance and Obert Miller made the decision to move the audience into the horse top. As the wind began picking up Miller told everyone to seek shelter in their cars.

Just as the final person exited the horse tent the big top blew down. Then, as the last horse left the horse top also collapsed.

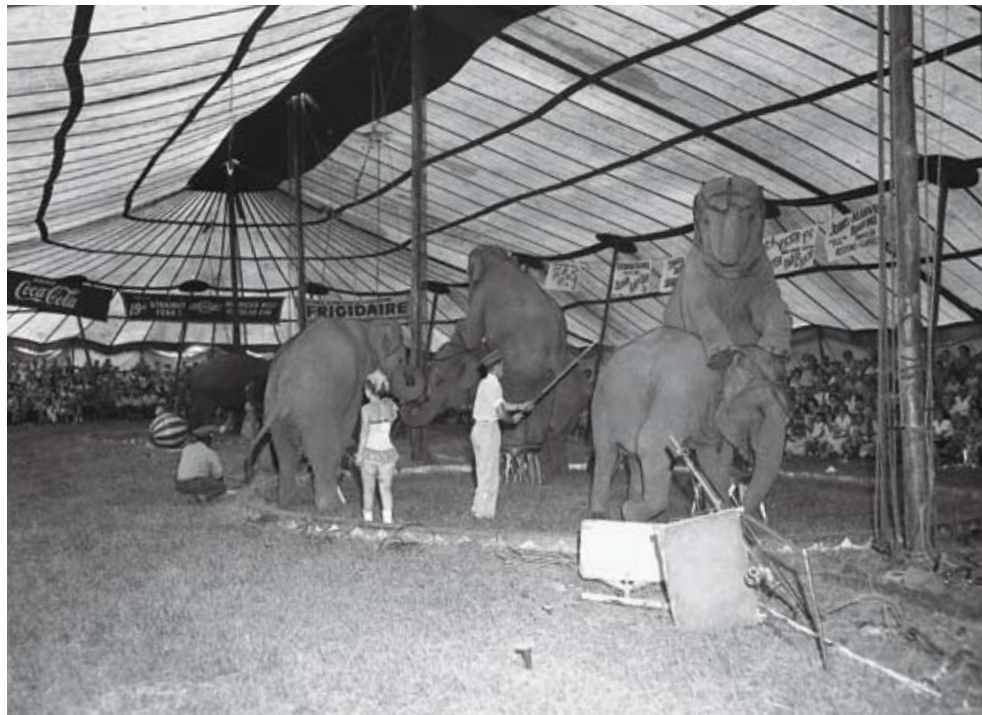
The skies did clear around 5:00 P.M. that afternoon, and even though it was a very muddy lot, Dorey and all who could help, began putting the big top back up. Despite ripped canvas and some damaged props, nearly three-quarters of the seats were filled for the evening performance.⁴⁹

The 1953 season was defined by what the Route Book called "an endless run of bad weather," which included several blow downs and near blow downs along with 13 consecutive days of rain and mud the last two weeks of the season.



The Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus promoted many national products through "co-op advertising." This example is from 1952 when the polar bear cage was branded for Philco freezers and one of the models was featured on the wagon as it rolled through town. In exchange, local merchants and dealers would promote the circus in their newspaper advertising.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections



Elephants were an important part of any Kelly-Miller performance and menagerie. This photograph shows Fred Logan and then wife Shirley Lindemann-Logan, in the near ring of performing elephants.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center

There was also a labor shortage that year, and business for the show was spotty throughout the season. By the time the show closed in Atlanta, Texas, revenue was off 20% from 1952.⁵⁰

Shortly after the circus arrived in Hugo in early November, the Millers announced that they had hired veteran animal trainer Terrell Jacobs as a featured attraction for the 1954 season. Although *The Billboard* reported that Jacobs was expected to make five appearances during the performance with his lions, a tiger-riding elephant and a new bear act, audiences only saw his standard big cat act, which featured his wire-walking lion Tommie and a lioness named Sheba.

Jacobs had two lion cubs on the show in 1954 and Sonja Barta remembered how the baby lions would startle people who were walking through the backyard. "Our trailer was next to Terrell's and he would tie the cubs under his trailer. Every day we would hear towners screaming when the baby lions would snap at their ankles."⁵¹

Although Terrell Jacobs' long career included time as a headliner on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Sells-Floto, Al G. Barnes and Hagenbeck-Wallace, the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. circus of 1954 marked his last full tour with a traveling circus prior to his death in 1957 at the age of 54.

The first serious storm of the 1954 season hit while the show was in Stockton, Kansas about a month into the tour. The aerial ballet had just begun when the girls on the webs began screaming. "They started lowering the girls down as soon as the wind started blowing so hard," an eyewitness re-

ported, adding, "The tent blew right over our heads and to the north. The bleachers we were sitting in stayed up, but a lot of other bleachers collapsed."

About 1,500 people were in the tent at the time. While there were some cuts and bruises, the only significant injury was a broken ankle. Fortunately, none of the trucks were damaged, nor were any of the animals injured.⁵²

By the mid-1950s the Miller's strategy of sticking to small towns in rural areas was paying off. In addition to the money generated by ticket sales, the show was finding there were opportunities for both national and local sponsorships and product placement on the showgrounds.

Jim Royal, who started with Kelly-Miller as a ticket seller in 1966 and later



Sonja Lindemann (Barta) joined Kelly-Miller when she was seven years old and spent the next eight years with the show.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

was general manager of the show when it was owned by John Ringling North II, remembered discussing the sponsorships years later with D.R. Miller.

"He told me that in those days the show did not get paid directly from the sponsors, but the local merchants were required to put ads in the paper. For days there were ads in these little local newspapers placed by the Chevrolet dealer, the Frigidaire appliance distributor or the Red Goose shoe store."⁵³

The advertisements were tied to local promotional appearances set up by an advancement man named Arthur E. Bitters who would tell people his middle initial stood for "Everywhere," and as one newspaper reported, that was his destination when he arrived in a new town.

Over the course of just a few hours Bitters would typically arrange for Fred Logan to take a group of elephants to the local Chevrolet dealership, a farm implement outlet to provide a tractor for a tug-of-war with an elephant and a promotion at a store that sold Red Goose children's shoes.⁵⁴

The shoe store appearance was part of Sonja Barta's daily routine. "Dorey built a float that looked like a goose and each morning Otis Hill would hitch six Shetland ponies to the wagon and drive us through town to the Red Goose shoe store," she said. "I had a treasure chest full of prizes that I would give to kids who bought shoes. Everybody on the show called me 'The Red Goose Girl.' I hated it," she laughed.

On circus day the big top was also filled with banners that were hung inside the big top to promote local merchants.

Lucy Loyal, whose family had a riding act on the show, explained how the banners were sold. "They charged by the size of banner you wanted," she said, "Anywhere from probably ten dollars on up and each morning there would be a list of different merchants who wanted to advertise in the tent." The banners were then painted on long sheets of white paper and hung by clothes pins on lines that stretched around the interior of the tent.

Loyal recalled the day her younger brother Nini discovered the banner paint in the back of a trailer. "He painted the whole inside of that trailer," she laughed. "Then he painted the feet of the horses that were tied outside of that trailer...I mean, he painted everything!"

By the time the unauthorized party was discovered, young Nini Loyal was soaked with paint, and although he pleaded his innocence, both Dorey Miller and the sign painter gave him a lesson he did not soon forget.⁵⁵

Although 1956 is remembered by circus historians as the season that King Bros., Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and the Clyde Beatty Circus all closed early, Kelly-Miller broke the mold and had a banner season. During the same week that John Ringling North declared the tented circus "a thing of the past," Kelly-Miller was playing to capacity audiences.⁵⁶



When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey closed in 1956, Kelly-Miller created special posters to sell tickets for what they billed as a vanishing form of entertainment.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Circus Collection

As newspapers rang the death knell of the American circus, the Millers rushed to print large posters that declared, "Last of the Circus. See It Now or Miss it Forever." Business was strong for the remainder of the season and when 1956 came to a close, management said it was one of the best years in the history of the show.

It was also in 1956 that D.R. Miller came up with another innovation that saved time and streamlined the operation. "The Kelly-Miller seat wagons were different than those on other truck shows," Ben Rossi recalled. "They were semi-trailers that had sides that folded down at an angle and the wheels acted as jacks."

The framework folded outward in two sections on each side to give additional width. The wagons each had eight rows of benches attached to the floor and all of them were equipped with backrests. A frame at the rear of the trailer supported pulleys for raising and lowering the seats.

The circus tested one of the wagons in 1956, and by the start of the 1957 season they were used for all the reserved



The Kelly-Miller seat wagons were designed by D.R. Miller and first used in 1956. The trailers were driven into the big top where the sides were unfolded on an angle, providing a natural ramp from the ground to the top row of seats.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center

seats.

The new seat wagons took up more space under the big top than traditional bleachers, and to accommodate the trailers and the hippodrome track a wider tent was needed. The new big top used six center poles.⁵⁷

In addition to the new seat wagons, those attending the 1957 edition of the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. circus also saw a wild west performance by Tim McCoy, the movie cowboy who had previously appeared on both Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and on his own Wild West show.

McCoy was at the tail end of his career, and while he would later appear with Jack Moore's Carson & Barnes circus, 1957 was the only time that he traveled with Kelly-Miller.

After the show opened the season in Paris, Texas it immediately faced seven days of rain, mud and cold weather, including the loss of two stands in McKinney and Stephenville. The lots in both Texas cities were quagmires and no substitute could be found.

When sunshine finally appeared on May 3, the circus soaked up

Shirley Lindemann-Logan's family started the Seils Sterling Circus, one of the first shows where D.R. and Isla Miller performed in the mid-1930s. Prior to joining Kelly-Miller, she appeared as a showgirl on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

business as it moved toward its first tour of the Pacific coast. From Texas the show moved west into New Mexico, Arizona and California, followed by dates in Oregon and Washington. After a swing through Idaho, the show circled back into California.

The circus traveled 12,309 miles in 1958 and covered more ground than any previous season. Despite the bad weather in the spring, the Millers reported that business conditions were relatively good.⁵⁸

That winter Kelly Miller sold his share of the circus to D.R., and while Obert continued as General Manager, Dorey Miller was now the sole owner of the show.

Among the new additions to the circus in 1959 were a set of small circus wagons designed to fit on





The Kelly-Miller sideshow was managed by Tommie and Sandra Thompson for many years. In this photograph taken in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on August 21, 1963, Sandra is on the bally stage as Tommie described their knife-throwing act, a feature in the sideshow.

Bob Cline Collection

the open bed of the seat trailers in the same manner as a traditional railroad show flatcar. The wagons had rubber tires and carried animal cages, poles and props. Each morning they would be hitched to a tractor and pulled out of the end of the trailer and down inclined “runs” to where they would be spotted on the showgrounds.⁵⁹

The menagerie was also moved from the sideshow to a separate tent in 1959, and it was there that the herd of 14 elephants was exhibited, along with the giraffe, hippopotamus and other animals.⁶⁰

Over the years Kelly-Miller seemed to have more than its fair share of wind and rain, and once again the show was faced with what was described as “an endless run of bad weather.”

When the show was in Marshall, Minnesota on July 22, strong winds blew down the big top, then less than two weeks later, when the show was in Aitkin, Minnesota tornado force winds swept across the lot midway through the evening performance.

That night management decided to end the show early, and the three-quarter house was safely outside when the tent collapsed. The big top, seat wagons, bandwagon and blues were all damaged, and the next day 60 people were put to work sewing canvas.

In addition to several blowdowns and near blowdowns, during the last two weeks of the 1959 season the circus had 13 consecutive days of rain and muddy lots. When the show arrived in Hugo on October 26, it had been on the road for six months and traveled nearly 8,000 miles. Business that season was described by the Millers as “spotty.”

Despite the challenges of 1959, the Circus Historical Society singled out Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. as the “Circus of the Year” for “doing the most to improve its overall operation and bring a greater number of traditional circus features to the American public.”⁶¹

Kelly Miller died of cancer while the circus was in winter quarters preparing for the 1960 tour, and less than a month later the trucks were back on the road for one of the most difficult seasons in the history of the show.

In what started as a replay of the 1958 route, the show moved from Texas across New Mexico and Arizona before crossing into California near the southern border with Mexico. As the show moved into the Los Angeles suburbs it was repeatedly challenged by local officials.

The problems started in Pomona where Dorey Miller was arrested on the lot and fined \$100 for employing a 12-year-old and 14-year-old in the Florenze tight wire act. The State of California filed the charges against D.R. stating that



The huge menagerie was a tremendous draw. On circus day the rhinoceros and other animals were paraded through the small-town streets pulled by a team of six horses.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center

it was “illegal to use children under 16 in hazardous jobs.”⁶²

Two days later in Whittier, the date was canceled when the Los Angeles County Fire Department said the grass on the showgrounds was a fire hazard. The advance sale had to be refunded when the sponsor was unsuccessful in finding an alternative lot.⁶³

The circus then moved up the coast and entered Canada at Vancouver before crossing back into the United States in Washington State and starting a route that took the show into Idaho, Wyoming, Utah and for the first time ever Nevada.

The circus set up in Las Vegas on September 11 on a sweltering day when temperatures reached 115 degrees. Despite the heat, the residents turned out for the show, and some customers came to the circus wearing their bathing suits.

For the next four days the show gave performances in several small Nevada towns until a series of accidents stopped the show in its tracks as it was enroute from Carson City to Placerville, California.

The most serious crash claimed the lives of truck driver Harry Smalley and equestrian director Harry Thomas.

According to investigators Smalley collided with a pickup truck as he was coming down a steep grade on Highway 50 in El Dorado County. When the semi smashed into the smaller truck, the circus tractor caught fire and the trailer carrying the elephants was torn from the cab, plunging into

a gully. The six elephants then escaped from their trailer, though none of them was seriously injured.

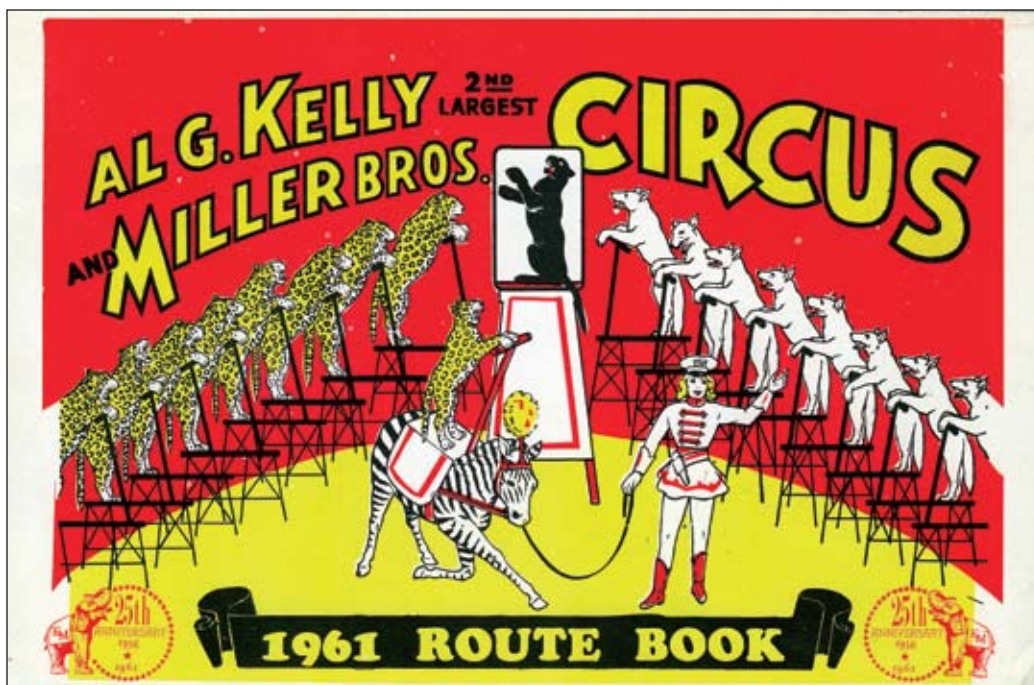
After the pickup truck was hit by Smalley’s semi, it careened out-of-control and slammed into another circus trailer that was carrying the show’s giraffe. But there were even more problems when a third truck carrying the show’s rhinoceros and hippo rolled down an embankment and smashed against a boulder when its brakes failed.⁶⁴

The rest of the show made it to Placerville and although the circus missed the matinee, it did give a performance that evening. Nevertheless, while the show was on the lot the California Highway Patrol inspected the trucks and determined that 34 of them had faulty brakes.

A judge ruled that the show could not be moved until all the trucks were brought up to code. Because there were very few qualified mechanics in Placerville, the repairs moved very slowly, and the show missed performances in seven Northern California towns.⁶⁵

Once the trucks passed inspection, the show continued the tour, returning to Hugo in early November. Although the circus covered 12,345 miles, 22 performances were lost on the route that took it to ten states and into Canada where police shot several big cats when a truckload of cages overturned while the show was in Merritt, British Columbia.⁶⁶

Despite the challenges of the season, D.R. Miller was confident about the future and began preparing plans to observe the show’s 25th anniversary in 1961 with the acquisition



The "Wild Animal Fantasy" was a feature during the "Silver Jubilee" season of 1961. The act included leopards, dogs, a zebra and a black panther, and was presented by a 19-year-old billed as Princess Leota.

Tegge Circus Archives

of two principal wild animal acts. The most unusual was the Cuneo Wild Animal Fantasy which consisted of nine leopards, a black panther, a zebra and nine Alaskan dogs that were billed as "Siberian Snow Wolves." D.R. also acquired a mixed wild animal act from Eddie Kuhn along with an act that featured five llamas and a pony.⁶⁷

Fred Logan had originally been tapped to present the Wild Animal Fantasy, however during rehearsal in Hugo he was attacked by one of the leopards. Although Logan did exhibit a lion act on the show in 1961, the big mixed animal act was presented by 19-year-old Rebecca Garner who was billed as Empress Leota.

All of the show trucks were painted silver in 1961 in honor of the show's 25th anniversary tour, and for the first time the circus was routed into upstate New York, then south along the east coast and into Florida – all new territory for Kelly-Miller.

In his comprehensive review for *The White Tops*, James Harshman pointed out not only the magnitude of the "Silver Jubilee" show, but also marveled at the multi-purpose design of many of the trucks. In addition to explaining how the cages were piggybacked onto the six seat wagons, he described a new truck that carried concession stands on the road and when opened on the circus lot transitioned into the marquee and front door, creating four walkways into the big top.

The circus performance itself was presented in five-rings in an eight-pole big top that seated approximately 3,000.⁶⁸

Following the success of the Silver Jubilee Season, D.R. Miller brought back the street parade in 1962. The parade

consisted of a bandwagon, eight of the small cages, two larger wagons for the hippo and rhino, eleven elephants under the command of Freddie Logan and an air calliope pulled by the six-pony hitch.

The novelty of the parade generated significant press throughout the season as did the addition of two featured spectacles, *Toyland* and *Dance to the Sun God*.

The new four-pole big top seated 2,500 and was four feet higher than previous seasons, allowing the addition of the Esqueda Troupe, the first time a flying return act was included on the Kelly-Miller program. "Princess Leota" was back with the Jungle Fantasy mixed animal act in 1962, along with the Loyal bareback troupe.⁶⁹

After his success in 1961 and 1962, Dorey Miller unveiled his latest idea shortly after the circus returned to winter quarters. It was his most ambitious plan ever – a floating circus.

"The ship will work just like the old-time railroad circus," he announced. "We will put into ports along the coast which ordinarily don't have access to a circus.

"We will unload the animals, set up the big top, the bleachers and the arena, then stage the show like the old timers used to. The ship will travel at night and there will be a show in a different town every day."⁷⁰

Miller hoped to expand on his formula of taking animals and circus acts to places where entertainment choices were limited or nonexistent. While the original Kelly-Miller circus would still be routed over familiar highways in 1963, the newly created second unit would travel not by truck, but rather by sea.

The vessel was the *Fleurus*, a combination freighter and passenger ship that Miller outfitted to transport and house animals and circus performers. The original plan was to sail up the east coast to Canada, then to Iceland, back to the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal and to the west coast of South America before crossing the Pacific.⁷¹

It was a revolutionary idea, and it was doomed from the start.

Although Miller had converted the 232-foot ship into living quarters for 65 people and 50 animals, the 40-year-old freighter was plagued with problems from the day of the planned departure, June 1, when an elephant and two ponies got loose. That same day the captain was injured when



A group of specially-built cage and prop wagons were carried on the flat bed inside of the seat wagons. The wagons were unloaded down "runs" in the same manner of a traditional railroad circus. One of the wagons had slipped off the ramp when this photo was taken in Bennington, Vermont in 1963.

James Cole Collection

he walked through a plate glass door.

With those accidents behind them, the *Fleurus* set sail the next day, but the ship was only a few hundred feet from shore when there was a problem with the steering mechanism that forced it to return to the dock to wait another two days for repairs to be completed.

The ship eventually departed on June 4, but only 21 hours later an engine piston cracked off the coast of Georgia. While the vessel was drifting, the ship's radio also died and there was no way to call for help. Then the refrigeration system failed, spoiling the meat that was meant to be fed to the lions and tigers.

It took four days before a rescue plane was able to spot the crippled ship drifting in the Atlantic.



The *Fleurus* caught fire and sank on the day after the show gave its first performances in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. The shipboard tour was doomed from the start.

Yarmouth County Museum, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia



When the ship caught fire, circus employees and firefighters worked feverishly to save the animals from the flames.

Yarmouth County Museum, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia

The *Fleurus* was towed to Charleston where it underwent three more days of repairs before returning to sea. A few days later the voyage was interrupted again when the engine died off the coast of Cape May, New Jersey.

Eventually the *Fleurus* limped into Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, two weeks behind schedule.

The circus unloaded in Yarmouth and gave two performances on June 24 when disaster struck as the ship was being loaded for the next date in Liverpool, Nova Scotia.

"I was sitting in the lounge when the alarm went off," Barbara Miller-Byrd recalled. "We immediately knew that the ship was on fire."

Although all of Yarmouth's 135 firemen answered the alarm, they were unable to make any headway. As the circus employees evacuated the ship, dockworkers swung crates and cages that contained about 40 animals from the burning boat as the three elephants and most of the ring stock were led to safety.

While nearly all of the animals were rescued, a horse named Sparkle managed to escape from the hold and throw himself into the harbor. The horse was confused by the cha-

os and swam under the wharf where he became trapped.

Several students from Florida State University had been hired by Miller to help with the tour including Bob Dawson of Boca Raton. When Dawson heard the panicked horse below the dock he dove into the water and heroically led him to shore. A Brahma bull also swam to safety as the ship sank.

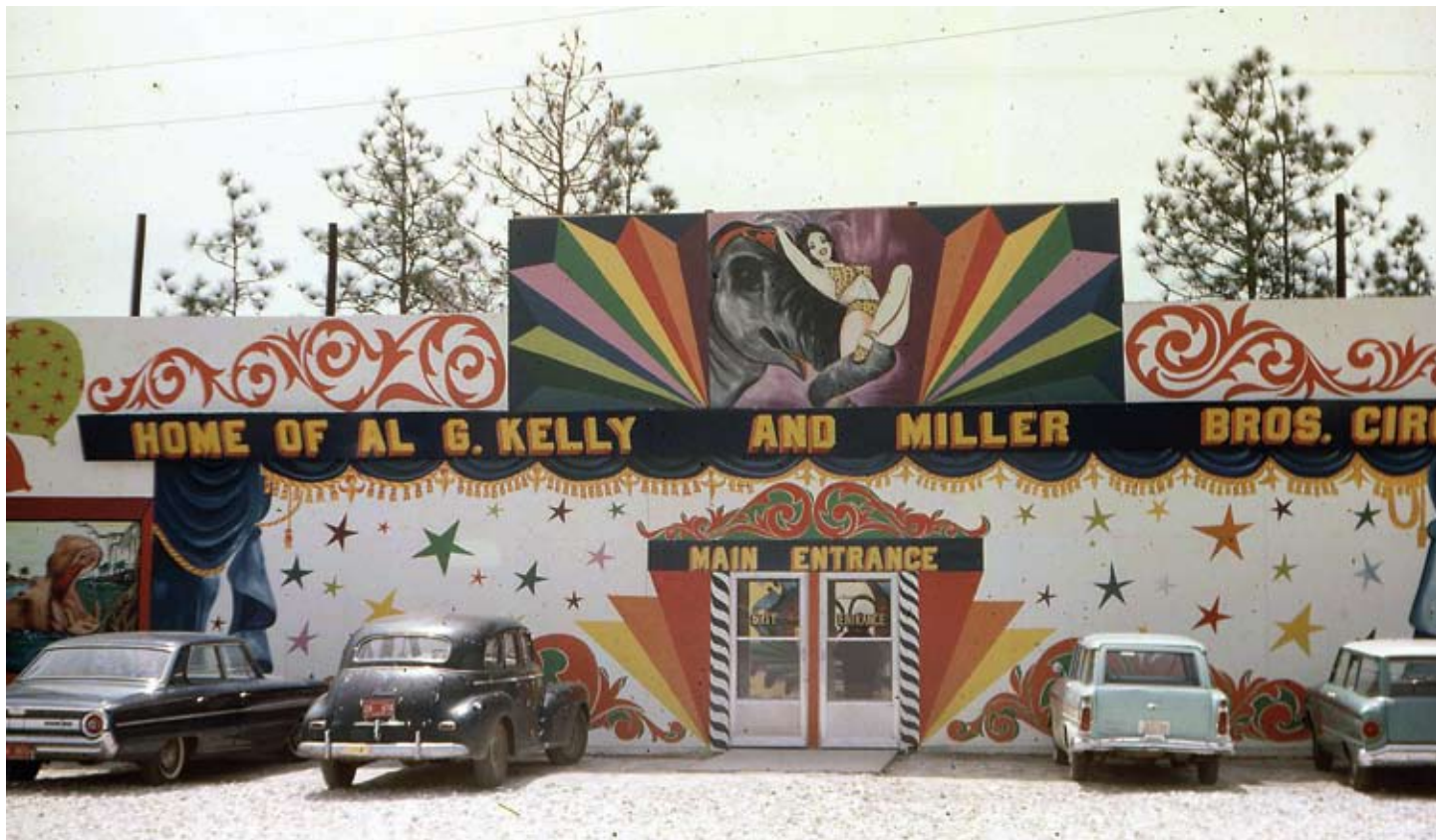
Unfortunately, one zebra was still below deck when the ship settled onto the bottom of the harbor. Miraculously it was the only animal lost in the disaster.

Even though the circus rigging had gone down with the ship, the show briefly continued to tour Nova Scotia. "My father put us on a bus and rented trucks to take the show to the next town," Barbara Miller-Byrd recalled.

The *Fleurus* disaster could not have come at a worse time for D.R. Miller.

At the same time Miller was trying to salvage his show in Canada, he was indicted by a federal grand jury in Oklahoma on charges that he had underpaid his income taxes by nearly \$50,000 for the years 1956 through 1960.⁷²

The investigation focused on years that D.R.'s late broth-



At the end of the 1963 season, a temporary winter quarters and tourist attraction was set up in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

Bob Cline Collection

er Kelly handled the show's bookkeeping. According to Barbara Miller-Byrd the investigation came as a surprise since her father did not have direct involvement with the circus finances in the late 1950s.



D.R. Miller once said, "When your name is Does you have to defend your manhood quite often." During his long career, that fighting spirit revealed itself many times when he faced adversity.

Richard and Albert Conover Collection

"The IRS came after him pretty strong," she recalled. "They made his life pretty miserable for a few years."⁷³

As the case worked its way through the courts D.R. Miller remained free on his own recognizance, but according to Miller-Byrd, when prosecutors threatened to keep her elderly grandfather on the witness stand for several days, D.R. made a deal to plead no contest to one of the charges with the understanding that the other three counts would be dismissed.⁷⁴

In April of 1964, Miller was fined \$5,000 and placed on three-years' probation.⁷⁵

Despite his legal problems and the *Fleurus* disaster, D.R. Miller never stopped planning for the future. When the circus closed the 1963 season in Ocean Springs, Mississippi he set up a temporary winter quarters there and began developing a tourist attraction on Highway 90 along the Gulf of Mexico.

Although the circus toured in 1964, as the season progressed Miller's financial challenges forced him to downsize. The hippo known as Miss Oklahoma, along with the rhino, the Cuneo leopard act and at least three elephants were sold to Mexican circuses. Both the giraffe and the show's African elephant died on tour and two pony drill acts were sent home because there was no trainer.

"My father really went into a deep depression," Barbara Miller-Byrd recalled. "That was the only time I ever saw him come close to giving up."⁷⁶

But he did not give up, and although the show was



These small cage wagons were displayed in the menagerie and used in the street parade that the circus presented in 1962.

James Cole Collection

smaller than previous years, it continued to move on 18 trucks. The Kelly-Miller menagerie of 1964 still exhibited a polar bear, a leopard and a puma, along with the five lions and eight elephants worked by Fred Logan.

The program included the Riding Loyals with two horses, a liberty act and a wild west concert. The band still had two trumpets, a drum and organ.

During a conversation with Tom Parkinson, D.R. Miller said that the nut on the show was about \$2,000 a day and he was becoming increasingly impatient with the phone promotion that was structured to sell tickets.⁷⁷

Times were changing, and so were audiences. "I remember one day we took in \$80," recalled Barbara Miller-Byrd.⁷⁸

The 1964 route took the show into New England, including dates in Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and when the show closed in Chickasha, Oklahoma on October 7, most of animals and equipment went back to Ocean Springs although Miller returned to Hugo.

By 1965, the show had been cut down considerably as evidenced by detailed notes that circus fan John Holley made during a visit to the show in the small town of Evansdale, Iowa on August 4.

Holley wrote, "...the show looked much as it looked when I saw it in July 1962...but older and more used." He then recounted his conversation with Dorey who spoke at length about his continuing problems with the IRS and the fact that "The government was still trying to collect an enor-

mous amount of money from him."⁷⁹

Those legal issues may have been one of the reasons why D.R. leased the circus to his longtime manager Joe McMahon during the 1966 season. Dorey continued to travel with the show that year, managing the show's concessions, but once again weather played havoc with the route. By the end of the season the circus had lost 17 performances to storms, flooded lots or truck breakdowns.⁸⁰

Although the show began the 1967 tour with 15 trucks, disaster struck early when a blowdown in Ft. Dodge, Iowa on June 15 leveled the big top and forced the cancellation of the next five dates.

In his *Bandwagon* review of the season Tom Parkinson wrote, "The once proud and powerful Kelly-Miller Circus was unrecognized by its former standards." When the season ended, Joe McMahon took most of the equipment to Ocean Springs and D.R. pulled his six elephants and five lions off the circus and took them back to Hugo.⁸¹

The Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus returned to the road for one more abbreviated tour in 1968. Working ahead of the show that year was Jack LaPearl, a veteran clown who had started in the circus business more than 60 years before. Each day he would put up a few window cards and drop off press releases at local newspapers. "Sometimes they ask me if the circus is dead," he once told a reporter. "Not as long as there is a circus fan. Not as long as there is a kid. Not as long as there is a granddad who remembers and wants the kid to



D.R. Miller was always looking for new features for his show. In 1962, towns along the route were treated to a street parade that featured horse drawn wagons, elephants and a calliope.

Bob Cline Collection

know too. That way the circus will never die.”⁸²

Dorey Miller could not have said it better.

Although a future incarnation of the Kelly-Miller Circus would return to the road, first under the ownership of David Rawls and later John Ringling North II, at the end of the 1968 season the circus founded by Obert Miller closed, and within a year Miller too passed on.

D.R. Miller had faced many challenges in the late 1960s, but for more than 30 years he had lived and breathed his family’s circus. “He knew the circus business like nobody else, and there was nothing on the show that he could not do,” recalled Jim Royal who knew D.R. Miller for more than three decades.

Over the years the Miller family had leased animals and invested in other shows located in Hugo, including Jack Moore’s Carson & Barnes Circus. When Moore died in the spring of 1969 Dorey Miller took an active role managing the show, gradually buying the Moore family’s interest until he became sole owner in 1971.

“Part of it was show business and part of it is life in general,” said Barbara Miller-Byrd. “There were many times when my dad was pretty low. He got beat down, but he never gave up.”

D.R. Miller spent more than three decades building *America’s Second Largest Circus*, and when the show that carried his family’s name closed, he seized the opportunity and started another chapter. For the next 30 years, Dorey Miller built on his legacy through the success of Carson & Barnes, a legacy that continued even after his death in 1999.

According to Barbara Miller-Byrd, her father’s secret for success was more than the time-tested formula of bringing a big show to a small town, “It was his love for the circus and the joy that it brought into people’s lives. He took great pride

in that.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald once famously wrote, “There are no second acts in American life.”

He obviously never met D.R. Miller. **BW**

Acknowledgements

The history of Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. from 1937-68 could not have been written without the recollections of Barbara Miller-Byrd and her willingness to share her memories associated with the daily operation of the show, and more importantly to provide insight into the resilience of her parents and grandfather as they faced the challenges and triumphs associated with ownership of *America’s Second Largest Circus*. The author also gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Sonja Barta, Maureen Brunsdale, Robert Cline, James Cole, Jim Elliott, Paul Holley, Jennifer Lemmer Posey, Ben Rossi, Jim Royal, Mark Schmitt, Peter Shrake and Timothy Tegge.

Endnotes

1. Ben Rossi, telephone interview with the author, May 24, 2021.
2. “Circus Blows Up at Falls City,” *The Columbus Telegram*, (Columbus, Nebraska), May 26, 1951, p. 1.
3. In 1918 Coop & Lent became the first circus to transition from rails to trucks. “Coop & Lent Show Motorized,” *The New York Clipper*, May 22, 1918, p. 5.
4. Tom Parkinson, “Ponies, Paint, Paper Chart Way for Obert Miller Circus,” *The Billboard*, Oct. 7, 1950, pp. 29, 33.
5. Ibid.
6. Joe McMahon, *Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Official Record and Route Book, 1961 Silver Jubilee Tour*, (Acme Printing Co., Hugo, Oklahoma: 1961) p. 48.
7. “Miller Bros. Circus Shows Here,” *The Dodge Criterion*, (Dodge, Nebraska), July 29, 1939, p. 1.
8. Barbara Miller-Byrd, telephone interview with the author, May 25,

- 2021.
9. Tom Parkinson, op. cit.
10. McMahon, op. cit.
11. Parkinson, op. cit.
12. Barbara Miller-Byrd, telephone interview with the author, June 6, 2021.
13. "The Al G. Kelly and Miller Bros. Circus," *The Loup Valley Queen*, (Callaway, Nebraska), July 14, 1938, p. 8.
14. "Two Straw Houses and Turnaway in a Week for Kelly-Miller," *The Billboard*, Oct. 22, 1938, p. 29.
15. McMahon, op. cit.
16. "Fire Destroys Kelly Property," *The Billboard*, Dec. 10, 1938, p. 32.
17. William "Buckles" Woodcock, *Buckles Blog*, Hagenbeck-Wallace Elephants 1940 #1, May 2, 2008.
18. "Coming to Arapahoe," *Holbrook Observer* (Holbrook, Nebraska), July 4, 1940, p. 4.
19. McMahon, op. cit., p. 49.
20. "The Al G. Kelly and Miller Bros. Circus Here," *The Wheaton Journal* (Missouri), Apr. 13, 1939, p. 1.
21. "Circus Coming to Beggs," *The Beggs Independent* (Oklahoma), Apr. 14, 1939 p. 1.
22. Regan Henson, "Circus City, USA," *Oklahoma Magazine*, Sep. 25, 2012, p. 36.
23. See "The Circus in Wartime 1941-1945," *Bandwagon*, Vol. 64, No. 3. pp. 4-31.
24. Diana Gerba, "Elephants and Cherry Pie," Dept. of Communication, Stanford University, 1988. YouTube, retrieved Jun. 6, 2021.
25. "Circus Coming to Emerson," *Emerson Tri-County Press* (Nebraska), July 9, 1942, p. 1.
26. "Kelly-Miller Circus Drew Big Crowd," *Emerson Tri-County Press* (Nebraska), July 23, 1942, p. 1.
27. Bob Parkinson, "Al G. Kelly and Miller Bros. Circus 1943," *Bandwagon*, Aug. 1943, p. 9.
28. McMahon, op. cit.
29. "Circus Animals Flee As Tornado Hits Camp," *The Post Crescent* (Appleton, Wisconsin), Mar. 4, 1944, p. 1.
30. Rossi, op. cit.
31. "Injuries as Circus Tent Is Blown Down," *The Lexington Clipper*, (Lexington, Nebraska), Jun. 25, 1945, p. 1.
32. Miller-Byrd, op. cit.
33. "Bill Woodcock's Circus Album," *Bandwagon*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 1959, p. 12.
34. McMahon, op. cit., p. 50.
35. "3 Shows at Hugo Stamp Its Circus Capital of S.W.," *The Billboard*, Mar. 30, 1946, p. 76.
36. "Kelly-Miller Builds Barns, Adds Animals," *The Billboard*, Dec. 28, 1946, p. 48.
37. Sonja Lindemann Barta, telephone interview with the author, May 23, 2021.
38. Bill Green, "Al G. Kelly and Miller Bros. Circus," *Hobby-Bandwagon*, Aug. 1949, pp. 3-5.
39. "Circuses," *The Maryville Daily Forum*, (Maryville, Missouri), June 11, 1949, p. 1.
40. "Robbers Bind, Slug Circus Owners, Escape with \$16,000," *Sequoyah County Times*, (Sallisaw, Oklahoma), Oct. 21, 1949, p. 1.
41. Tom Parkinson, "Kelly Miller Show Skeds Longer Season; Business Big in Indiana," *The Billboard*, Sep. 9, 1950, p. 72.
42. Ben Rossi, telephone interview with the author, Jun. 6, 2021.
43. "Danbury Veterinarian Administers 10 Million Anti-Tetanus Units To Biggest 'Patient' of His Career," *News Herald* (Port Clinton, Ohio), Aug. 10, 1951, p. 1.
44. "Flying Squadron," *The Billboard*, Sep. 9, 1950, p. 74.
45. Rossi, op. cit., June 6, 2021.
46. "3,000 Greet Circus Early," *Greeley Daily Tribune* (Greeley, Colorado), May 30, 1952, p. 1.
47. "Circus Plane Flips Over," *The Winona Daily News*, (Winona, Minnesota), July 16, 1952, p. 17.
48. Rossi, telephone interview with the author, May 24, 2021.
49. Bob King, "Kelly-Miller Puts it Up Twice, Takes it Down Once," *Bandwagon*, June 1953, p. 15.
50. "Official Record and Route Book, 1960," Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros., p. 59.
51. Sonja Barta, telephone interview with the author, June 5, 2021.
52. "Kelly-Miller Circus Tent Blown Away, None Injured," *Argus-Leader*, (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), May 27, 1954, p. 12.
53. Jim Royal, telephone interview with the author, May 24, 2021.
54. "Bitters Arranges Circus 'Tie-Ins' at Local Merchants," *Moberly Monitor-Index* (Moberly, Missouri), June 7, 1956, p. 13.
55. Juliana Nykolaiszyn, interview with Luciana "Lucy" Loyal, Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Oklahoma State University, June 30, 2011.
56. "Kelly Miller, Allied Shows Scoring Well," *The Billboard*, July 28, 1956, p. 84.
57. "Kelly-Miller Builds New Seat Wagons," *The Billboard*, Feb. 16, 1957, p. 68.
58. "Kelly Miller Battles Weather, Loses Two Days," *The Billboard*, May 12, 1958, p. 60.
59. "Kelly Miller Wagons Arrive; Owner Returns from Mexico," *The Billboard*, Dec. 14, 1959, p. 142.
60. "Kelly-Miller Circus Makes Changes," *Bandwagon*, Jan.-Feb. 1959, p. 7.
61. "Al. G. Kelly and Miller Bros. 1959 Circus of the Year," *Bandwagon*, Mar.-Apr. 1959, p. 2.
62. "Circus Operator Pays \$100 Fine," *Progress-Bulletin* (Pomona, California), Apr. 20, 1960, p. 17.
63. "Fire Restrictions Halt Circus Here," *The Whittier News* (Whittier, California), Apr. 18, 1960, pp. 1, 3.
64. "Fiery El Dorado Crash Kills 2, Perils Elephants," *The Sacramento Bee*, Sep. 17, 1960, p.p. 1, 5.
65. "Smashup Cancels Circus Showing in Folsom Park," *The Folsom Telegraph*, (Folsom, California) Sep. 22, 1960, p. 1.
66. "Kelly Miller Home After Tough Season," *The Billboard*, Nov. 14, 1960, p. 53.
67. "D.R. Miller Buys Cuneo Cats, Llamas, Kuhn Mixed Animals," *The Billboard*, Dec. 26, 1960, p. 39.
68. James L. Harshman, *The White Tops*, Jul.-Aug. 1961.
69. Leland Antes, Jr., "Al G. Kelly and Miller Bros." *Bandwagon*, Nov.-Dec. 1962, pp. 15, 17.
70. "Seagoing Circus to Play Nova Scotia and Bahamas," *The Tampa Tribune*, May 25, 1963, p. 18.
71. "Sailing Circus Boatless," *The Bridgeport Post* (Bridgeport, Connecticut), Sep. 22, 1963, p. 4.
72. "U.S. Indicts Circus Owner," *The Daily Oklahoman*, (Oklahoma City), June 12, 1963, p. 17.
73. Miller-Byrd, op-cit., June 6, 2021.
74. "Plea on Tax Charges," *The Kansas City Times*, Jan. 16, 1964, p. 1.
75. "D.R. Miller Tax Guilt," *The Kansas City Times*, Apr. 8, 1964, p. 9.
76. Miller-Byrd, op. cit.
77. Tom Parkinson, "Review of the 1964 Season," *Bandwagon*, Nov.-Dec. 1964, pp. 30-35.
78. Miller-Byrd, op. cit.
79. John Holley, "Circusing - Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus, Evansdale, Iowa, Aug. 4, 1965" - Paul Holley Archives, Kenosha, Wisconsin.
80. Donald R. Carson, "High Grass and Miller Magic," *Bandwagon*, Jan.-Feb. 1969, pp.22-27.
81. Tom Parkinson, "Review of the 1967 Season," *Bandwagon*, Nov.-Dec. 1967, pp. 18-21.
82. Stu Huffman, "Circus Not Gone, but the Living Isn't So Easy Now," *The Republic* (Columbus, Indiana), May 6, 1968, p.12.



*Splendid
Rivers of*

Scarlet,
**Silver &
Gold**

Views of the Ringling Parades 1910-1915

*Opening and introductions
by Greg Parkinson*

Lewiston, Maine 1913

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center

It has been said that the circus parade of yesterday was the Pied Piper that led townsfolk out to the showgrounds. The gaudy posters and the bold-print newspaper ads had caught the eye of nearly every local resident, but the free morning street march on circus day was the most impressive appeal to attend the show. The Ringling Bros. parades of the early 1910s were resplendent examples of such efforts.

At the dawn of the 20th century, many of America's great circus men were already absent from the scene and no longer producing horse-drawn street parades, and in 1904 James A. Bailey commanded his last circus parade. In contrast, the relatively young Ringling brothers represented a new generation of showmen, and the parades they produced were flourishing. Moreover, the year after Bailey's death in 1906, the Ringlings acquired the Barnum & Bailey circus with its additional set of parade equipment.

By 1910, the Ringlings owned and operated the three largest railroad circuses in the United States – their colossal namesake enterprise, the Barnum & Bailey show, and Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Each of the original partner brothers were still alive. Al, the oldest, turned 58 that year. The five men were becoming wealthy; they were experienced circus managers; and they were veteran producers of daily street parades with 26 years of experience.

In this perspective, *Bandwagon* provides photographic evidence of the lavish and disciplined street marches the "Circus Kings" staged between 1910 and 1915. It was during this period that the family's dynamics began to change. Otto died on April 2, 1911, and Henry became a full partner that year. Al, who had served as a guiding force during the wagon show days, died on January 1, 1916. Hence, 1910 was

the last year the five founding brothers worked together, and 1915 was the final season with Al's inspiration.

Three single day stands have been selected for review: Asheville, North Carolina in 1910; Lewiston, Maine in 1911; and Anamosa, Iowa in 1915. The accompanying narrative for each date comes from local newspaper coverage. These newspaper accounts, as well as the 1911 *New York Clipper*, reported huge attendance at these engagements. Such large crowds provided continuing evidence of the popularity of American circus parades.

The Ringling Bros. parades of this period had no towering telescoping tableau wagons or examples of the 40-horse hitch, but they certainly did include spectacular, and in some cases, one-of-a-kind parade entries. The famed Ringling Bell Wagon continued to echo from building walls as it paraded between 1910 and 1915. The exemplary 16-camel hitch – a mixture of Arabians and Bactrians – on the Egypt Tableau was an eye-full as it passed. The team of 24 four-abreast Percheron horses made a splash as it pulled the Swan Bandwagon through the streets of town. The large hippo cage, a zebra hitch, a big mounted brass band, the Snake Den and the boisterous steam calliope were also distinguishing.

Of course, the parade presented during the 1915 season was not the end of the line. The costumed riders, musicians, clowns, teamsters, animal men, horses and elephants continued to assemble and march each morning for another five years before Ringling ended this segment of its promotional efforts. Nevertheless, the views from Asheville, Lewiston and Anamosa remind us that once upon a time the *World's Greatest Shows* introduced itself on circus day in an extraordinary way.



The red and gold Swan Bandwagon pulled by Percheron horses made an impressive appearance as it rounded a corner in downtown Asheville in 1910. It was the last year that the Ringlings used a 24-horse hitch on their lead bandwagon.

H. W. Pelton photograph, Greg Parkinson Collection

Asheville, North Carolina

Herbert W. Pelton (1879-1961) was a prolific commercial photographer who moved to Asheville, North Carolina in 1905, working there for the next 25 years before relocating to Washington, D.C. When the Ringling circus came to town in 1910, Pelton was on hand to capture its grandeur with his camera.

Located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, Asheville was a prospering community in 1910 with a population of 18,762. The following account from *The Semi-Weekly Citizen* of October 21, 1910 provides details about the Ringling Bros. stand in Asheville on Monday, October 17, including coverage about the downtown parade and the big top performances.

Enormous Crowd Attracted by Show

Estimates of Attendance Run as High as 18,000

Splendid Parade, But Performance Was Somewhat Disappointing to Circus Goers

Most everything in Asheville stopped yesterday [actually four days prior] for the circus. Most everything apparently in the neighborhood of Asheville stopped also and came in to see the circus. Certainly, no show has ever attracted such a crowd as that drawn here yesterday by Ringling's outfit, and no circus tent was ever so packed, jammed and crowded at a performance in this locality as were the Ringling tents at yesterday's two performances.

Estimates of the number inside the show tent ran as high as 18,000, but that was probably because in a multitude the ordinary faculties of estimation are jumbled, but there were thousands and thousands there and the show people's statement as to the capacity of their tent at fifteen thousand will probably cover the crowd that attended.

There were all sorts and conditions of people and from early morn until the small hours of dewy morn again the city was full of people.



The focal point of this photograph was the Great Britain Tableau with the side show band riding on top.

H. W. Pelton photograph, Hertzberg Collection, Witte Museum, San Antonio (Texas)

In order to permit the school children to attend the show, the city schools gave a holiday, and the Superior court which should have been in session found that it had nothing to do. Other offices, shops and factories and business houses were deserted from the time the parade struck the middle of the city until business hours ended.

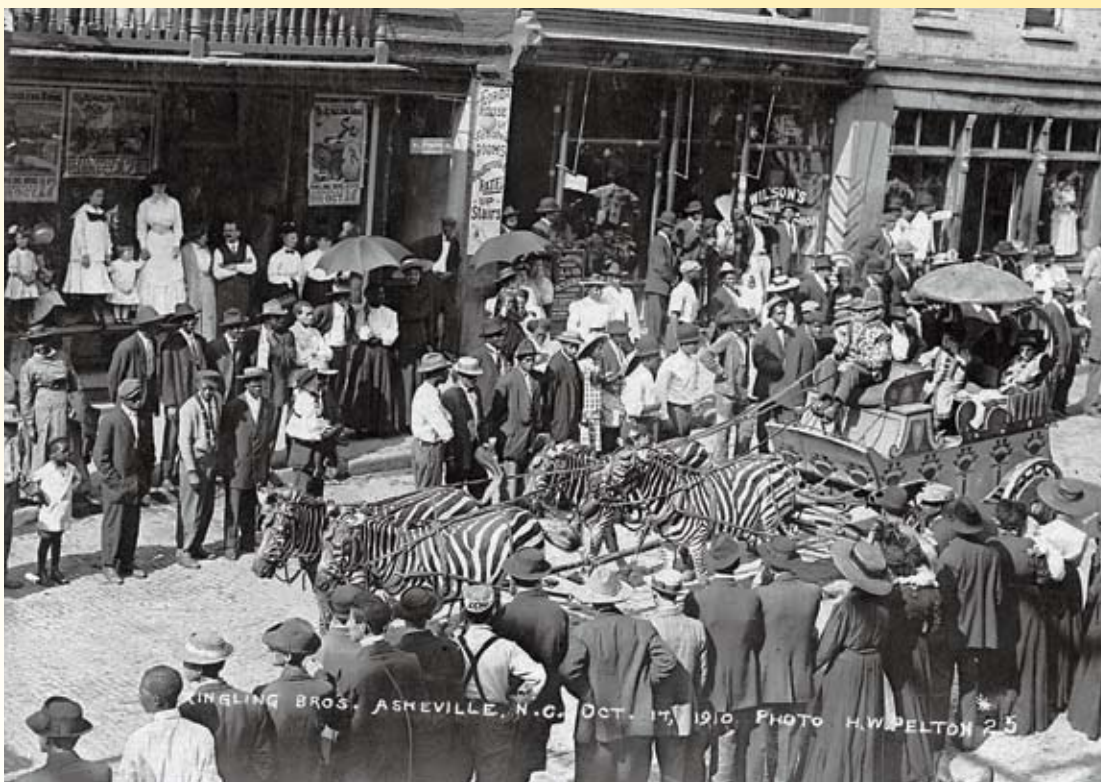
The parade was so long that the dense crowd on Patton Avenue got tired of seeing it pass. There were at least two

miles of it all together, and from the time the band wagon, drawn by twenty horses, passed until the last wagon disappeared down S. Main street there was a constant string of surprises. There were six brass bands, hundreds of horses, a whole menagerie, and men women and children crowded into the procession until one wondered when it would end. Certainly, Ringling Bros. do not stint the public in their free exhibition, for no finer parade was ever seen with any circus

than they gave yesterday.

The Ringling zebra hitch routinely followed the Egyptian float pulled by camels in the order of march.

H. W. Pelton photograph, Hertzberg Collection, Witte Museum, San Antonio (Texas)



The parade was scheduled to start at ten o'clock and unfortunately for many who always make a time allowance for a circus, it did, and was over before eleven.

The performance at the show grounds beyond the depot also began promptly on time. In fact, the crowd was so great that the people were hurried on from the menagerie into the main tent half an hour before it began, only to find that every seat was taken.

Of the performance itself, praise must be more moderate. It was a



When the forward advance of circus parades stalled, it was a common practice to turn the elephants sideways in the street to make it easier to control of the herd. Note the mounted outriders patrolling in front of the elephants. The Ringling Bros. United States Tableau is seen on the left edge of this photo. H. W. Pelton photograph, Hertzberg Collection, Witte Museum, San Antonio (Texas)

good show, but not the greatest show that has ever been seen in Asheville by any means. There was something doing every minute, but sometimes there was only one thing at a time, which was somewhat disappointing to the circus goer whose great delight is to cry, "Look! Look!" as new and unexpected wonders break upon his vision from every side. The circus goer wants to be kept so busy seeing so many things at once that he cannot stop to criticize any one thing, and this the Ringlings failed to do. They gave a good, clean, standard circus, but they are lacking in the new thrilling events which are expected nowadays with the passing of each year. Most

everything that they showed had been shown before just as well and repetition is the sign of decadence in circusdom.

The fifty clowns even failed to produce any novelties, and worse still, they were withdrawn entirely from the ring for long periods at a time. One departure, however, was a number in which nothing but clowns participated, and this was one of the best in the program. The riding was good, especially the rough riding at the end, which closing the program with the time-honored chariot race, left the taste still keen for the next circus that comes, no matter whether it is the best that ever was or not.

A large crowd that included onlookers perched on balconies and in upper-floor open windows, enjoyed the Ringling Bros. circus parade in Asheville. The spectacle stretched as far as the eye could see.

H. W. Pelton photograph, Hertzberg Collection, Witte Museum, San Antonio (Texas)





Large crowds attended the parade and both performances in Lewiston, Maine on a pleasant Saturday in 1911.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center

Lewiston, Maine

When Ringling Bros. *World's Greatest Shows* played Lewiston in 1911, the city had a recorded population of 26,247 making it one of Maine's largest cities at the time. The following item from *The Oxford Democrat* of South Paris, Maine, dated May 30, 1911, announced that the circus would be coming to nearby Lewiston on June 10. Note that this promotional piece claimed that the parade would be "the greatest street spectacle ever devised for circus purposes."

Lewiston

Announcement is made that on Saturday, June 10, Ringling Brothers' World's Greatest Shows will give two performances in Lewiston.

This is the greatest of American circuses in every sense of the word, and an event not to be overlooked by the lovers of wholesome amusement.

For many years the Ringling Brothers have maintained the most popular as well as the best show. This year they are more than ever giving patrons their money's worth. Among the many great attractions under the twelve acres of canvas are Prof. Emory's [sic] troupe of trained baby elephants, the wonderful Schuman performing horses from the Circus Schuman, Germany; "Toque" the dog marvel of England which does a somersaulting performance on the back of a swiftly running horse; the wonderful Alex family of French aerialists; the great Crocker family of Gypsy riders; the Deltoreill family of Hungarian clowns, once entertainers in the court of the Shah of Persia; the Bonsetti family of Italian acrobats, the Castrillion family of Spanish acrobats; the Hodgini family of Italian equestrians, and the fifty greatest clowns on earth.



The Ringling parade of 1911 was indeed a lavish procession. It was also a highly disciplined presentation as can be observed in this image taken in Lewiston.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center

In the menagerie is found Tiny Tom Tinker, the smallest elephant ever seen in America. In all there are forty elephants and 1,200 other wild beasts, comprising the rarest of zoological specimens. The morning parade is the greatest street spectacle ever devised for circus purposes. There are three miles of it and every mile a mile of wonders.

Ringling Brothers' circus is twenty-eight years old. It began its career as a one-horse affair in Baraboo, Wis., when the now famous brothers were scarcely more than children. In the face of the bitterest opposition it grew into the greatest amusement institution the world has ever known. Its field extends over the entire earth. It has offices in every capital of Europe and Asia and foreign workshops near Liverpool. It employs over 2,000 people, 1,286 of whom travel with the show.

In this short account from *The New York Clipper* dated June 17, 1911 (page 10), the noted Ringling performer who was identified as "The Children's Favorite Clown" commented on the June 10 stand in Lewiston, Maine.

Clown Alley Smoke

Ringling Bros.' World's Greatest

By Geo. Hartzell

After one hundred and three miles we arrived in Lewiston early, and had a short haul and good lot, only hilly. Lobsters very plentiful here, and there was a rush for the lobster wagon as it appeared on the lot. Many of the folks had to have a route card, a map and full directions of how and what to eat of them.

Business big in Lewiston.

Anamosa, Iowa

Milton Herbert “Herbie” Weiss (1886-1960) operated a photo studio in Anamosa, Iowa from the early 1900s to about the time the United States entered World War I in 1917. When Ringling Bros. played Anamosa in 1915, Weise took many wonderful photos of the parade passing through the business district, as well as the show’s layout at the fairgrounds.

Anamosa is a rural community in eastern Iowa located on the winding Wapsipinicon River. Its population in 1915 was 2,983 making it one of the smallest towns played by Ringling that year. *The Anamosa Eureka* of September 9, 1915, provided this extensive report about circus day on Saturday, September 4.

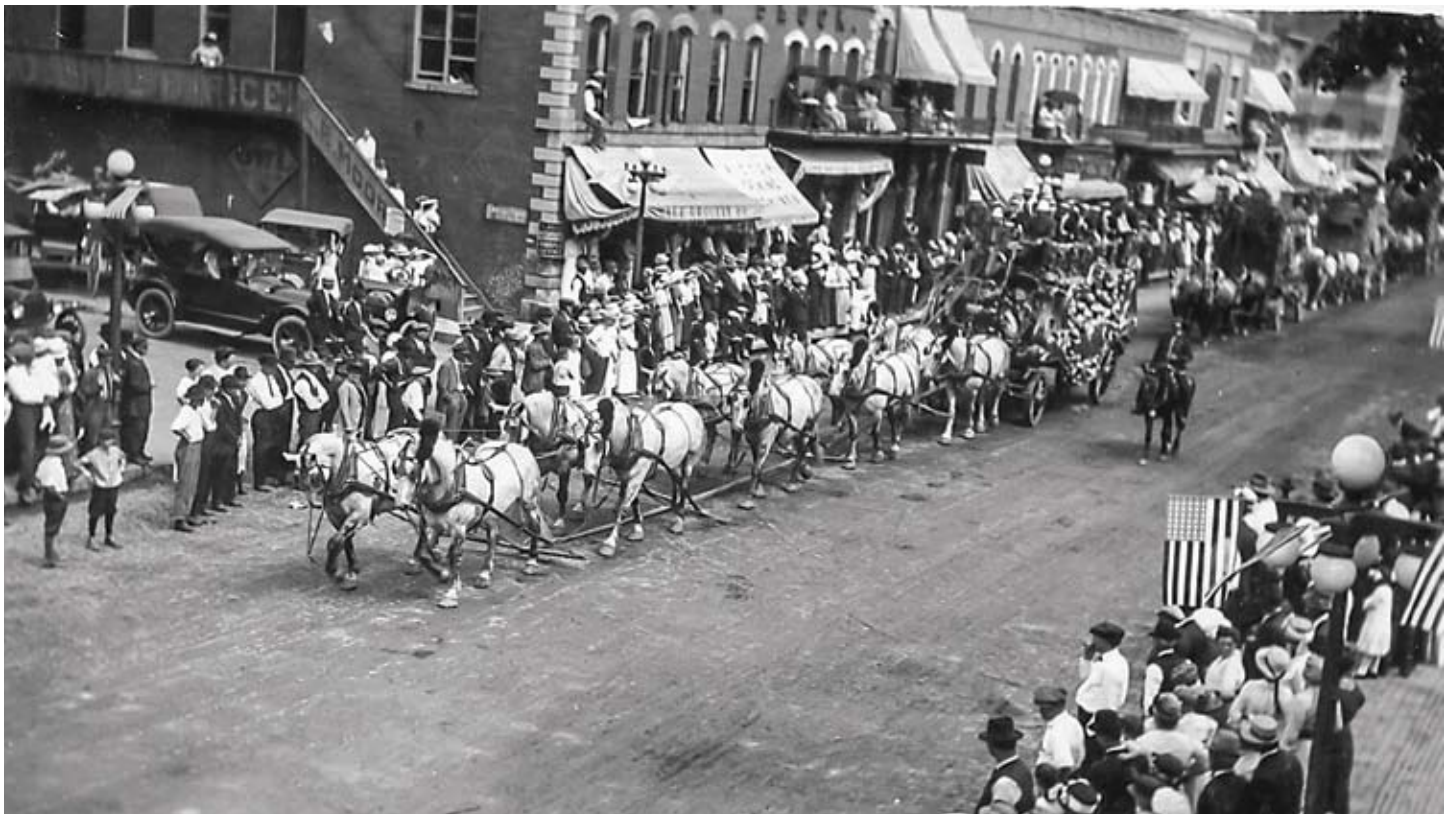


The Ringling parades of the era were led by a simple carriage pulled in this instance by a single white horse. In earlier times, Al Ringling drove this unit, but in Anamosa it was Johnny Agee, the show’s equestrian director.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)

The Ringling Lion Tableau with its brilliant gold-leafed carvings is preserved today at Circus World Museum in Baraboo. The glittering wagon and trailing parade units are slightly out of focus in this view taken in Anamosa, Iowa in the fall of 1915.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)





As the blaring strains of the Lion Tableau's brass band began to fade, the big hippo cage came into view.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)

Ringling Day Proves a Big One

Ringling Day

The Ringling Shows brought to Anamosa Saturday one of the largest crowds in the history of the city, a crowd estimated at from 12,000 to 15,000 people. The shows came from Postville, and went from here to Ottumwa. The last of the incoming trains did not reach Anamosa until after 10 o'clock, delaying the parade until 12:30. The last section was loaded and left the city at 2 o'clock Sunday morning.

The day was smiled upon by the weather man. The crowd was a most orderly one. No arrests were made. Only one or two drunks engaged the attention of the police. The crowd was handled in excellent manner. Side streets were reserved for automobile parking, and hundreds of cars lined the curbs. There was a jam at the fairgrounds immediately after the parade, and busses were held in this jam for 20 minutes before they could turn and get back to the city. Notwithstanding the great crowd not a single accident was reported.

The eating houses, refreshment stands and most of the stores, reported a large business. Some of the establishments were cleaned out of eatables. Some of the business houses report the largest business in their history – a business exceeding the receipts of several Fair days.

Shows Pull Mammoth Crowd to Anamosa and Give Clean Performance

Ringlingville is a traveling town of over 1,500 souls. Like a morning glory it peeps forth at dawn, rising with the sun as though unfolded by a magic hand. Almost stealthily it steals away in the night, dissolving like a film of ice before furnace heat. [omission regarding the size of several towns in Iowa]

Ringlingville came to Anamosa last Saturday, transported on four railroad trains consisting of 89 massive cars. The first train arrived at daylight, and from then until noon the rattle of chains, the croak of heavy wagons, and the clatter of hoofs, were the accompaniment of a movement which for precision, accuracy and smoothness, was akin to a new six-cylinder engine.

Like mushrooms springing forth under an April sun the tents went up and Ringlingville took form in streets and industries on the grassy plats at the fairgrounds. It brought to us a mammoth hotel with three great dining rooms – one for the colored fellows, one for the rough white laborers, and one for the better class of show attaches [newspaper's contemporary portrayal]. The hotel had an army of cooks, waiters and helpers. It had a batter of ranges and a big steam cooker. Ringlingville carried its own meat market with a re-



The fourth section of the Ringling train arrived in Anamosa at 10:00 in the morning, delaying the start of the parade until about 12:30.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)

frigerating plant on wheels. It put up its own little store where employees, for cash or on charge account, could buy clean handkerchiefs, tobacco and other small articles. It brought its own barber shop with two skilled barbers who set up a shop in a tent all by themselves. It brought its own doctor with his pills, his plasters and a kit of surgical instruments, who stood ready for sick calls or for aid to the injured of the odd little town. It brought its own police force – plain clothes men who are familiar with all the crooks of the country, and know well the habits and the manner of the loose and the vicious. This force mingled all day long with the throngs who visited Ringlingville. It stood an ever-watchful protector over those who knew not of the presence of these guardians of the peace.

Ringlingville brought its own post-office where the mail was handled in much the same manner that it is in any government office in the country. It brought its own bank where during the Saturday morning hours the employees cashed their pay checks. This bank thus paid out a sum the call of which would embarrass any country bank not given warning that such a demand was to be made. It brought its own school attended by children of the show – those accompanying their parents who were employed as actors or in an

official way. Thus, the children do not lose anything in school work by that five months' absence from the public schools that is a result of show life.

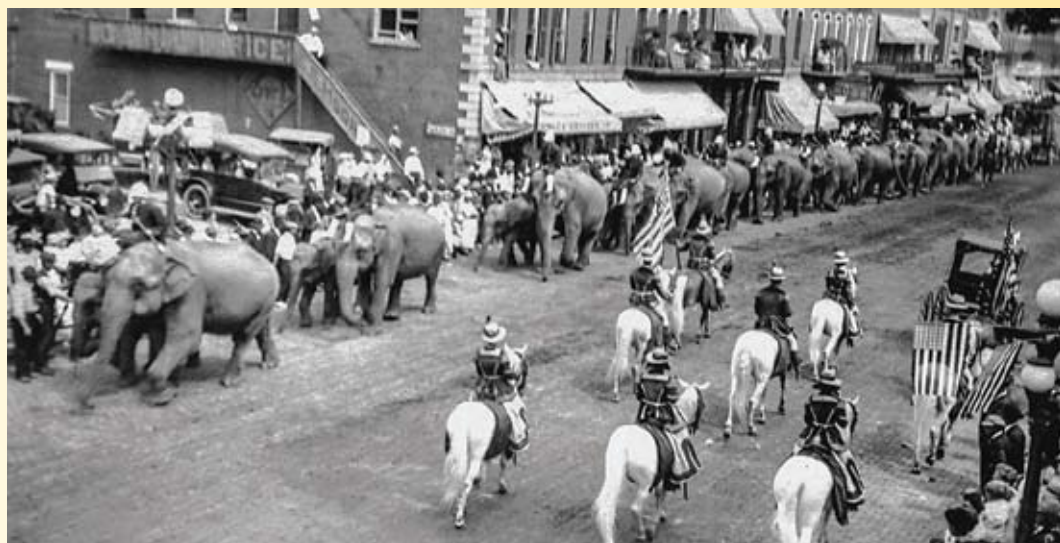
Ringlingville brought its own stables where between 700 and 800 horses – some of them well-nigh priceless in value – were cared for. It brought its own granary, stretched forth on the green sward and presided over by a fatherly looking individual whose soft answers to curious questions betokened pride in his work. The granary handles over 200 bushels of mixed feed for the stables every day. Ringlingville brought its own blacksmith shops where three

sinewy looking smithies, as sooty as the smithies of any crossroads village, were getting music from a steady tatco on temporary anvils. It also brought its own harness shop where a lone workman was doing his best to keep up with the pressing business of the community.

Ringlingville brought a large pipe organ, sweet in tone and good enough to grace the loft of a city church. It brought one of the largest theatres in the world on the stage of which was enacted a biblical drama in pantomime [*Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*]. There were hundreds in the caste and the costumes and trappings were gorgeous enough indeed for the court of Solomon.

The parade route in Anamosa required a return of units down the principal street. This scene shows 26 of the show's elephants passing the vanguard of the parade consisting of the equestrian director's carriage and costumed riders.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)



The Five Graces Bandwagon was built in New York City for the Adam Forepaugh Circus in 1878. Although it was styled after Howes Great London's Globe Tableau, the wagon can be distinguished by its irregular shaped mirrors and features of the centrally-placed gilded female figures. Five Graces, pulled by 40 horses, led Barnum & Bailey's parade during the 1897-1902 European tour. This magnificent parade wagon is today preserved and exhibited at The Ringling in Sarasota.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph,
Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)



Ringlingville brought all these things and many more, some of which must needs be passed over, some of which were bound to escape the eye of even the most observing. And to those who looked, and pried, and listened, it seemed, from the character of the town and from the air of orderliness that prevailed, that had Ringlingville spent Sunday here it would have provided a gospel service with every detail but the collection box, where its great organ would have piped the harmony of sacred songs, where a choir of earnest men

Built in 1913, the Ringling Bros. Air Calliope Wagon had seen only two years of service when it paraded in Anamosa. The steam calliope, of course, brought up the rear of the march.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)



and women would have chanted anthem and doxology, where a minister with the grace of God in his heart and the light of heaven in his eyes, would have preached the simple, soothing doctrine of the Savior, where rough faced workers and clean shaven athletes would have gathered shoulder to shoulder in church service. To gain such an impression of a circus is somewhat extraordinary, but the Ringling show is an extraordinary circus – one so clean that it can come to a community like Anamosa and go without leaving slightest cause for a single word of adverse criticism.

About thirty years ago when the Ringlings banished profanity from the vocabulary of their employees when they commenced war on the grafters and on loose characters, their show was dubbed the “Sunday school show.” It is an appellation they have never resented, and it must be said to their everlasting credit that they have forced a new deal in the show business. They have made the issue between uncleanliness and cleanliness – between honesty and dishonesty – so clear cut that today their show is the pattern for those who would succeed, and the pioneer in a movement which has gone to elevate the whole circus business. They jail grafters and crooks who persist in following them. They take the law in their own hands in communities where there is inclination to wink at games or devices which prey on visitors to the show. They



An estimated audience of between 12,000 and 15,000 filled the six-pole big top in Anamosa on Saturday, September 4. The population in 1915 was 2,983, making Anamosa one of the smallest towns played that year.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)

put the penalty of discharge on flirtations, and on the use of profanity or vulgarity among their employees. Women who visit the show are not met with the brazen stares of "calico trimmers." They are not insulted with the by-remarks of itinerant mashers, for woe to the Ringling employee who is thus caught. He cannot demand his pay check quick enough to escape the wrath of the management.

Back of all this organization, this discipline, this congregation of humanity, which make up a traveling town, there is a purpose – the presentation of a great circus performance. To speak in detail of the amusement side of the Ringling show would be to use space the columns of a paper will not permit. Suffice to say it is a vast presentation of most novel features from which the husks and shells have been culled leaving only for the spectator the real meat of worthy, rare acts. There is a wonderful blend of color throughout the presentation, a finely worked out assemblage of different acts, and a precision which carries with it a sort of positiveness, certainty and constancy which fasten themselves upon the observer and cling to him after the novelty and number of acts have ceased to a wonder. From the opening spectacle, "Solomon and the Queen of Sheba," which alone is worth the price of admission, to the final hippodrome race, the program is a kaleidoscopic presentation ranging from the absurdity of a multitude of clowns, to the classic poses of living statuary – from the nimble acts of ground acrobats to the daring flights of aerial athletes. The entire performance smacks of the same cleanliness and the same devout adherence to a moral code that is manifest throughout the management of the whole show.

Ringlingville's circus performance is only one of the delights of the day. Nowhere is there a more fascinating field for human interest than in a circus. Nowhere is there a greater opportunity for character study. Those who got the most from Ringlingville's visit to Anamosa were the young, and those who grew young again. They arose with the whistle of the first incoming train, to see the show unload, to watch the tents go up, to smell the early breakfast at the show lot, to admire the well-groomed horses, to see the hundred and one, or thousand and one things, all of which could not be seen in a casual glance, or which all could not see without taking time to study and pry.

At Anamosa Ringlingville filled its streets to the point of overflowing, and gave to Anamosa one of the largest crowds in the history of the city. At the afternoon show the big tent estimated to hold 15,000 people was well filled, the attendance probably coming to within 1,000 to 2,000 of the total seating capacity. At the evening show there was an attendance estimated at about double that usually expected in small towns at the night performances of a show of this character. The show reported a very satisfactory business here, and was well pleased at the treatment accorded it by business men and the community in general. The show got free license and free water, and its general supplies, purchased under a fair division among the various business houses, were bought at prices prevailing in the current markets without attempt to gouge or hold the show up. This is a feature much appreciated and one that has caused the show this year to try out many of the smaller towns in its tour. The management reported a very successful season in spite



Herbie Weiss recorded this view from the heights of the grandstand at the fairgrounds on the outskirts of Anamosa. The midway is dominated by the menagerie at the left and the side show annex at the right. In the foreground are the ticket wagons, concession tents and an unidentified pit show.

M. Herbert Weiss photograph, Anamosa Public Library (Iowa)

of the weather conditions and attributes much of its success to its routings in the smaller places. There is a growing disposition among the larger cities to mule all shows for heavy license and parade fees, and to enact expenditures at every turn. The smaller towns in this day of the automobile can furnish as big crowds as the larger cities. The territory thus opened up is well-nigh limitless.

Postville, a town of only 1,000 people, was visited by the show Friday. The crowd there was a record breaker for the show – people overflowing from the seats and taking places on the straw spread over the hippodrome track. The night performance fell to 1,000. Thus, the total receipts at Anamosa, where the night crowd was much larger than that, must have nearly reached the Postville mark.

The Ringling parade is a gorgeous and mammoth affair. Thousands thronged the line of the parade, and beheld a pageant which was marked for the freshness and brightness of trappings, wagons, men and beasts. This freshness was marked in considering the time of the season. The Ringling menagerie was a source of wonder, but there was an absence of some old-time favorites – an absence that is probably a mystery to many. The dromedaries and the camels were not there. There were no antelope, deer, oxen, or in fact any cloven-hoofed animals. This made a marked difference in the menagerie. This absence is due wholly to the government regulations imposed because of the “foot and mouth” disease and which bars transportation from state to state of any cloven-hoofed animals. [One of the worst outbreaks in the United States was in 1914, and it was a big story in Iowa

in August 1915 when the Governor and Legislature sparred over the necessity of quarantines.] **BW**

Acknowledgements

Thanks is extended to long-time Circus Historical Society member and collector, P.J. Holmes for bringing the Anamosa photographs to our attention. We are also grateful to Herbie Wiess’s grandchildren, Terry Wiess and his sister Karen Wiess, for their thoughtful donation of the Wiess photographs to the Anamosa Library where the images were recently digitized. Fred Dahlinger Jr. emailed several observations about the Ringling Bros. parades of the 1910s, and Chris Berry, Pete Shrake and Tim Tegge assisted with obtaining and transferring many of the images that illustrate this review.

Additional Background

Fred Dahlinger’s “In Perspective: The Circus Colossal’s Street Parades,” published in *Bandwagon* in 2019, provided many insights about the Ringling Bros. parades of the 1910s including how they were managed and modified during those years. The article also looked at the broader development and presentation of circus parades during the latter part of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century.

You Like it?

I Do it Again.



by Chris Berry

Dieter Tasso's Remarkable Career

Dieter Tasso amazed audiences with his sensational performances for seven decades.

Chris Berry Collection

The German words spilled out of the teenager's mouth as fast as Pat Valdo could translate them. "Motion pictures, ice cream, food, so many buildings, Radio City Music Hall, the Empire State Building...."

The reporter for *The New York Times* had simply asked the 18-year-old what he liked most about New York, and Dieter Tasso's enthusiastic response was no different than any other tourist describing the city for the first time, except that they were being translated by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's veteran performance director and resident linguist.

The 1952 edition of *The Greatest Show on Earth* featured 21 new performers who spoke every language but English, and one week into the engagement young Dieter was settling into the idea of simultaneously performing with others. "It does not matter, this business of three rings," he told the reporter by way of Valdo's translation. "There is so much applause for all. The cheering, whistling – it gives such a grand feeling to know that the audience is appreciative."¹

Although the circus program described Display #12 as

"Matchless Manipulating Marvels," Helmuth Gunther's juggling in ring one and The Bakers in ring three were overshadowed by the remarkable act that premiered in New York April 4.

*"Ladies and gentlemen, in the center ring, for the first time in America, Dieter Tasso the juggling sensation. The slackwire wonder of the century. Even after you see it you won't believe it."*²

Nearly 70 years after Ringmaster Nate Eagle first introduced Dieter Tasso at Madison Square Garden,³ the veteran performer vividly recalled his debut. "I did a very fast opening," he told *Bandwagon* as he described the act that began with the fast manipulation of a tennis racquet between two devil sticks, followed by quick short passes with three top hats and three cigar boxes.⁴

Still, Dieter was not accustomed to performing with others, especially other jugglers. "There were clubs going all the time," he recalled decades later. "They did better tricks than I did, and Helmuth Gunther was very good. I had to



Circus fan Sverre Braathen captured the moment that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey General Manager Art Concello took his own picture of jugglers Helmuth and Inga Gunther along with Dieter Tasso. The photo was taken in Madison, Wisconsin August 31, 1952, five months after the German performers arrived in the United States.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

fight him like crazy to get any attention.”

As Tasso was juggling the cigar boxes, the prop men set the stage for the routine that continued to marvel audiences well into the 21st Century, an act that was rooted in East Germany during the years immediately following the second World War.

Dieter Krakow was born in Berlin in January 1934. His mother and father had both been jugglers, and although they had stopped performing publicly about the time that he was born, some of his earliest memories were of balls and clubs in his home and watching performances by his uncle Otto Krakow, known as “Little Knox,” along with another one of his father’s juggling partners, Alfred Wolf, billed as “King Repp.”

World War II quickly disrupted entertainment in Europe and both Dieter’s father and his Uncle Otto were drafted into the German army, and as British Lancasters and American B-17s began bombing Berlin, ten-year-old Dieter was sent to a military school in Bavaria.

In the days just prior to Germany’s surrender the teachers and staff at his school fled as the Allied armies approached, leaving about 100 children to fend for themselves. Dieter was taken in by a family with 12 other children and put to work on a farm. “As I thought about my parents and uncle, I made up my mind to become a juggler and I made three clubs out of sticks.”

In the years immediately following the war the Red Cross worked to reunite children with their families and when Dieter was about 12 years old, he returned to Berlin where he learned that both of his parents had been killed in the war. He found his Uncle Otto who reluctantly took the boy in but scoffed at his dream of becoming a performer. “I had no talent whatsoever,” Tasso recalled. “My uncle always said, ‘you can be a shoemaker,’ but I wanted to be a juggler so badly that I got up at night and secretly practiced juggling with potatoes.”

Tasso remembered his uncle as a good comedy juggler, but not as talented as his father’s other partner, King Repp. It was King Repp who gave him his first props, three cigar boxes and a top hat, and who also convinced his Uncle Otto to take on an apprentice. When Dieter was 13 years old the two began performing as comedy jugglers billed as “The Two Krakows.”

Dieter’s introduction to performing coincided with The Berlin Blockade, the first major international crisis of the Cold War. From June of 1948 until May of 1949 the Soviet Union blocked the Western Allies from providing much of the city with food and supplies. The Krakows survived in part because of their performances at military bases throughout Berlin. “The Russians were the best audience, and the Americans were the worst,” he recalled. “They were more interested in seeing girls perform than watching a juggler!” He



In early 1952, Henry Ringling North saw Dieter Tasso perform at the enormous Friedrichstadt-Palast in East Berlin. Less than four months later, Tasso made his American premiere at Madison Square Garden.

added that the American soldiers were very generous to the family and provided the Krakows with food coupons and access to the stores at the U.S. military bases.

The performances for small groups of soldiers provided steady work, but Dieter's dream was to appear on stage at the Friedrichstadt-Palast, Berlin's huge variety theatre which changed its program every month, and always had a juggler on the bill. "Once I watched a juggler who started with the same tricks that I did, but at the end he tossed cups and saucers from his foot to his head. He stacked ten cups on top of each other! It was unbelievable!" Tasso recalled.

The 16-year-old did not even stay through the end of that performance before he rushed home and began practicing with cups and saucers made from papier-mâché. Once Dieter had learned the cup and saucer trick, his Uncle Otto gave him his stage name. "He said I should use the name 'Tasso.' Not only is it the German word for 'cup,' but it sounds the same in just about every European language."

The act was a hit and Dieter Tasso was soon performing at Circus Barley's permanent building in Berlin only two blocks from the Palast. Although the stunt with the cups had not been seen in the United States, other European performers were soon adding it to their repertoire.

"I heard that Rudy Horn had started doing the cups on a unicycle and when I was performing at Circus Barley I had the idea to do it on a slack wire," he recalled.

Dieter was on the bill with wirewalker Hans Wohlgefart, and the two of them nailed a piece of wire from one corner of the dressing room to the other. "We did not know how

slackwires worked," he recalled. "I had regular street shoes and I did not know you were supposed to wear soft shoes on the wire. With regular shoes if you get caught by your heel you will fall, but I did that my entire career."

Dieter practiced the cup and saucer routine on the slack-wire every day, presenting it in public for the first time in the summer of 1951 while touring East Germany with Zirkus Aeros. "My uncle told the manager that I would do the cup trick on the wire for another 500 marks," he recalled, "but the boss said it made no difference to him, so I did it without any additional compensation."

Word soon spread of the handsome teenager who balanced a tower of teacups while standing on a slackwire, and in January of 1952, as Dieter was celebrating his 18th birthday, his dream came true when he appeared onstage at Berlin's Friedrichstadt-Palast variety theatre.

It was at the Palast that Dieter Tasso gave a performance that changed the course of his life.

Henry Ringling North was in East Germany scouting for circus acts in the winter of 1952, and possibly using his position as a circus executive to gather intelligence for the Central Intelligence Agency.⁵ North took in a performance at the Friedrichstadt-Palast in East Berlin where he first saw the young juggler who balanced cups on his head.

Although North left during intermission, he sent his business card backstage. A short time later John Ringling North's European agent, Umberto Bedini, called and offered Dieter a contract to perform in the center ring of *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

"I could not believe it," Tasso recalled almost 70 years later. "Henry Ringling North saw us in Berlin in January, and we opened in New York in April. We were amazed how quickly he was able to fix all of the papers for us, and I was later told he was able to do it because of his work with the CIA."

Still, the Krakows had to be secretive. "We could not tell anyone we were going to America or they would not let us out of East Germany," Dieter recalled. "At the time we were able to travel by subway between East and West Berlin. Our suitcases were marked 'Artist's Props' so we would fill them up at our apartment in East Berlin and unload them at a relative's home in West Berlin. While we were in West Berlin, we heard on the radio that I had been given a contract to perform in America. My aunt called her apartment in East Berlin and the police answered. We said, 'that's it, we are leaving.'"

Tasso said the decision to leave Germany was very difficult for his aunt and uncle. "They were already in their 50s," he recalled. "To go to America was a big step for them and they did not know if they could do it. They were depending on my success and my Aunt Klara thought that if I left them, they would have no income."

With steamship tickets paid for by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, the three sailed from Genoa, Italy to their new life in America. In an ironic turn of events Uncle Otto was now Dieter's assistant.

"The first performances at Madison Square Garden were tough since we were not used to all of that noise. I remember crying and wanting to go home," he recalled. "But we had a contract for one year with a two-year option. We could not turn around and go back, and after only a few days we loved it."⁶

After five-and-a-half weeks in New York and a week at the Boston Garden, the circus opened under canvas in Washington, D.C. on May 20. When the train arrived at the Benning Road siding, Dieter and some of the other young performers started for the showgrounds. "As we were walking, we saw the poles and the tent slowly coming up. We had never seen anything like it, and we started to run to the lot. The closer we got, the faster we ran. That tent, it was unbelievable."

Dieter Tasso was the youngest performer on the Ringling roster in 1952, and throughout the tour the circus press agents promoted the young German and his poignant story of being orphaned during World War II.

Another angle that was pitched was akin to the fictional rivalry that existed between "Holly" and "The Great Sebastian" in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Because Tasso, in the center ring, performed at the same time as fellow German juggler Helmuth Gunther in ring one, newspapers would play up what they called the "natural rivalry" that existed between the two.

In these stories Dieter was always portrayed as the more

skillful performer. According to one reporter, even though Gunther would toss a tall stack of table china onto his forehead, "piece by piece into a balancing Leaning Tower of Pisa," and would finish his act with a lighted candle perched on top, "Dieter balanced on a swaying steel thread, which gave him a one-up on Helmuth, as he used cups and saucers, a teapot, spoon and a lump of sugar, all toe-propelled onto a weaving stack."⁷

The story went on to say that the two were "gentlemen of distinction, the hard way." Nearly 70 years later Dieter spoke fondly of his colleague. "We were good friends," he said. "We even dressed for the performance together between the seat



Millions saw Dieter Tasso's sensational act during his four live appearances on Ed Sullivan's television variety show.

Michelangelo Nock Collection

wagons."

Because of his center ring status, bandmaster Merle Evans tailored the music to Tasso's act rather than the performers who appeared in the end rings. Although the fast music matched Dieter's quick open where he juggled the top hats and cigar boxes, by the time he began tossing the cups and saucers the tempo became much slower as the drummer responded as each cup landed and the band played the jazz standard *Beautiful Love*.

It was not long before Pat Valdo ordered the performers in rings one and three to finish their routines early so that Dieter – and Dieter alone – was the only one remaining in the spotlight. When Dieter concluded his act by tossing the teapot and spoon to his head, all eyes were on the center ring.

Competing for the attention of the audience was a tremendous challenge for Dieter when one day he noticed yet another distraction out of the corner of his eye. “All of the sudden a clown came over and sat on the ring curb.”

It was Emmett Kelly.

“Here I was, concentrating and fighting for attention, and now people were watching this clown instead of me. I had no idea who Emmett Kelly was. The next time he came out he was drinking a cup of coffee as I was trying to toss the cups onto my head.”

Dieter soon saw the comedy, and more importantly realized that wherever Weary Willie went, the eyes of thousands of spectators followed. “It did not take me long to understand that the audience liked the interaction, and we began to play with each other. Emmett was great.”

Emmett Kelly was not the only veteran who took a shine to Dieter. Performance director Pat Valdo, himself once a juggler, seemed to give Tasso breaks not afforded to other acts. “One day I missed the teapot six times before I made it the seventh time, and he never blew the whistle.”

Years later when Valdo saw Dieter performing his comedy act, he gave him a trick that he used for the rest of his career. “He said, ‘Before you start your act make a ball out of putty and put it in with the rubber balls. Bounce the rubber balls and then drop the putty ball.’ Plop! It stuck to the floor! That gag came from Pat Valdo.”

There were many new experiences for the 18-year-old, including traveling by train and living in the same stateroom as his aunt and uncle. “I would have liked to have slept in a car with my friends. It would have been much more fun,” he chuckled. The Krakow’s stateroom had three beds, and Dieter slept on the top bunk which he said was full of comic books. “I loved funny books,” he said. “They were easy to read and that is how I learned English.”

As sensational as his act was, Tasso was always looking to improve it, and in 1953 he added a unicycle *and* a ladder to the slackwire act. “I first did seven cups and saucers,” he recalled, “then I put the unicycle on the wire and added the teapot. Next, I put a ladder on the slackwire, went up a couple of steps and I tossed the spoon.”

Although he practiced the trick for nearly a year, it was only featured in a handful of performances. “I fell a lot,” he recalled. “On a tightwire you can jump off – on a slackwire you fall on your head.” The ladder was only in the act for two or three weeks, and the unicycle for a little over a month. “It did not get the reaction I thought it would and I realized I could sell the cups better on the ground.”

During most performances Tasso balanced about seven



During his second season with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Tasso briefly performed his slackwire act on a unicycle.

Ted Sato photograph, Tegge Circus Archives

cups and saucers, though in time was able to place as many as 12 cups and saucers on his head while on the wire, and 14 on the ground. “Seven was best,” he said. “After about ten you lose the audience.”

One audience that he never lost were the millions who would tune in each Sunday night to watch Ed Sullivan on CBS. Dieter was booked on Sullivan’s program four times between 1952 and 1964, making his first appearance shortly after his New York premiere. Sullivan was so impressed when the teenager finished that he ad-libbed, “Eat your heart out Arthur Godfrey,” a reference to his television rival, whose *Talent Scouts* program competed with Sullivan for variety acts.

Dieter made his final live appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, January 5, 1964, sharing the stage with Soeur Sourire,



In the late 1950s, Tasso made the transition from the circus ring to sophisticated nightclubs.

Circus World Museum, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center

a Dominican nun whose song *Dominique* was a hit record at the time. For several years after the original broadcast, it was brought back as a rerun on Easter Sunday and viewers again enjoyed the Singing Nun and her catchy tune, along with a repeat of Dieter Tasso catching cups and saucers on his head.

Although audiences never seemed to tire of the routine, at the end of the 1954 season Dieter Tasso left Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and took his unique act to a variety of new venues, including nightclubs, fairs and of course circuses. "As soon as I left the Ringling show Al Dobritch grabbed me."

The veteran agent booked Tasso on Sweden's Circus Scott in 1959, followed by a tour of North Africa and France. While the show was in Algeria the country was in

the middle of a revolution. Although there were tense moments for the circus troupe in both Algiers and Oran, Dieter said that because there was no entertainment in Algeria at the time, the circus performances were frequently sold out.

After he returned to the United States, Dieter worked on the big Shrine circuses produced by Orrin Davenport, Tom Packs and George Hamid, performing essentially the same routine that Henry Ringling North had first seen in Berlin in 1952.

Dieter knew that the act had to evolve.

"They accepted me as a teenager," he said. "I worked with shorts in the beginning and had the personality of a young guy. Then that was gone."

The act gradually turned to comedy. "I was booked into nightclubs and they needed more time. My act was six to eight minutes and they needed 20 minutes. If you juggle for 20 minutes, they start throwing tomatoes." Fortunately, Dieter had the ability to make people laugh.

"I got the idea when I was working at Blinstrub's nightclub in Boston," he recalled. "I was watching an acrobat who missed a trick. He walked to the microphone and said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I goofed.' I liked that so much that when I would miss a trick I would say 'I goofed.' Then I missed again, and I would say, 'I goofed again.'"

He soon added another line which became his signature catchphrase. After completing a trick, he would step to the microphone and say, "You like it? I do it again!" He would then repeat the trick and quip, "That is my act. Sixteen times and it is over..."

For the audience, the comedy seemed impromptu. For example, if he missed a trick – usually on purpose – he might say, "It is in the act. It was not in the act last night...but it is today."⁸

As Dieter was developing his comic timing, he opened for many of the biggest acts in show business, including a young singer named Pat Boone, who had fond recollections of the two working together at Blinstrubs. When contacted by *Bandwagon*, the singer said that he remembered being amazed by Tasso's ability to stack cups on his head. "I realized it was not fake in any way," he said. "He was very accomplished."⁹

"We were very good friends," Dieter recalled. "At the time I worked on the wire with white buck shoes. One night before the show I remember him saying, 'Give me your green sports jacket and you wear my tuxedo coat.' Later I saw him on television, and he was wearing those white bucks. He did not wear them when we worked together in Boston!"

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s Tasso's act



A one week booking at Le Crazy Horse Saloon in Paris was extended into a series of annual engagements that lasted for 30 years.

Tommy Bartlett Show Archives, Wisconsin Dells

was featured on ice shows, fairs and nightclubs, and less than a decade after his first appearance at Madison Square Garden he returned to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, although not in the United States.

Less than five years after the circus moved into buildings and arenas, John Ringling North was looking for new markets for *The Greatest Show on Earth*, and in early 1961 he formed a partnership with the Cristiani family to create a second unit titled Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey International.¹⁰

The circus, which included many of the Cristiani family acts and animals, was framed by Daviso Cristiani and was booked into Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, along with Buenos Aires, Argentina.

As Cristiani was recruiting performers for the South American tour, he took Dieter to meet with Art Concello, general manager of the Ringling circus. "He really did not want to take me to South America," recalled Dieter, as he imitated Concello, "I'm not too crazy about you, he said, 'but I'll give you 400-bucks.'"

When the circus opened Tasso, along with Unus, were the hits of the show. "They had never seen the cup trick in South America," he said. "The people screamed and stomped their feet." In fact, the audience response in Rio de Janeiro was so tremendous that on March 13, only one day after the show opened, both the Canestrelli balancing act in ring one and the Lentini sisters in ring three were moved to another display, leaving Tasso to perform alone in the center ring.

Although Dieter's juggling act was always in demand, he was also briefly in the carnival business with his father-in-law, wild animal trainer Eddie Kuhn. Kuhn had recently sold his lion act to the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus and at the time was managing a small carnival. "He showed me the books," Dieter recalled, "and he said, 'you know you and I could do this.'"

The pair invested in four small carnival rides and Dieter booked the dates while Kuhn worked the midway. Over the next several years the K & K Shows grew to 13 kiddie rides that were either attached to larger carnival midways or set up at community fundraisers and church picnics. "We always got the spots that others did not want," Tasso recalled, adding, "but we made nothing but money. We made \$1,000 a night on the moon bounce alone, charging a quarter a kid."

The carnival disbanded when Dieter and Joyce Kuhn divorced and Tasso continued his solo act, appearing on the same bill with a multitude of stars, including Nat King Cole, Frank Gorshin and Norm Crosby. In 1976 he opened for Bob Hope at the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota.¹¹

"He did not know that I was doing comedy," Dieter recalled. According to Dieter when Hope heard the audience laughing, he went to the stage and watched the routine from the wings. As Tasso was leaving the stage, Hope said to him, "You're pretty funny young man, but don't be too funny."

Evidently Bob Hope wanted a juggler, not a comedian.

Dieter's comedy was a perfect accompaniment for Abe Saperstein's Harlem Globetrotters and from 1966 until 1970 he traveled with the team and was featured during pre-game and halftime shows all over the world, including two seasons when he appeared with legendary pitcher Satchel Paige who did a comedy baseball act.

Although Eddie McGuire had been hired to promote the basketball wizardry of Globetrotters Meadowlark Lemon and Curley Neal, the veteran press agent evidently could not help himself when he once told a reporter, "It is worth the price of admission just to see Dieter Tasso perform. His act is just great!"¹²

In October 1968 Dieter married trapeze artist Connie Armstrong but after only a few months of marriage tragedy struck when she was killed while driving to see him perform in Missoula, Montana. Dieter was informed of his wife's death only minutes before he was scheduled to appear at the University of Montana's Adams Field House, yet he refused to call off the performance, saying, "She would have preferred it this way."¹³



In 1978 Dieter Tasso was hired to perform at the Tommy Bartlett Show in Pigeon Forge by co-owner Tom Diehl, and Tasso spent the next 39 summers performing at the Bartlett theme parks in Tennessee and Wisconsin. After Tommy Bartlett died in 1998, Diehl and his wife Margaret became the sole owners of the water, sky and stage show enterprise.

Tommy Bartlett Show Archives, Wisconsin Dells

At about the same time that Tasso was touring with the Globetrotters, his former agent Al Dobritch was hired to book the acts at the new Circus Circus Casino in Las Vegas. Although Dobritch offered Tasso a job, he declined, and while he would eventually appear in Las Vegas, there were new opportunities for variety performers in the early 1970s and once again Dieter embraced a new venue.

"I was the first variety act to appear on the Royal Caribbean Lines," he said as he recalled his first performances on *The Song of Norway*, the only ship in the fleet that offered entertainment. During the cold weather months Tasso and his new wife Irene appeared on cruises that sailed from Miami, island-hopping in the Caribbean during the winter, and appearing at trade shows, Shrine circuses and fairs during the warm weather months.

It was during that period that Sandy Dobritch, the son of Tasso's former agent, reached out to him. An act working at the Hacienda Hotel in Las Vegas was leaving to tour with Liberace, and there was an opening for a four-week engagement. Dieter took the job and ended up performing at the Hacienda for a year.

At the same time that Tasso was playing to the casino crowd, Tommy Bartlett, the Wisconsin showman and theme

park operator, was finalizing plans for a new attraction in the Smoky Mountains. Tommy Bartlett's Water Circus was scheduled to open in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee during the summer of 1978, and Bartlett needed acts.

Tom Diehl, who purchased the Tommy Bartlett show after Bartlett's death, remembered getting a call from his boss who was in Las Vegas. "He said, you have to get out here and look at this guy. I went to Vegas, saw Dieter and it was a no-brainer."¹⁴

On March 11, 1978 Tasso wrapped his engagement at the Hacienda Hotel and took his act to Pigeon Forge, beginning a relationship with the Tommy Bartlett organization that lasted for 39 years, both in Tennessee and Wisconsin.

"When he joined us, he said that he did not know how much longer he could perform on the wire," Diehl said. "I told him, you do not need to be on the slackwire anymore, just do your act on the stage."

Dieter was 44 years old when he started with Tommy Bartlett and decades later he recalled a conversation when Bartlett said, "Dieter, you have the potential to be an unbelievably great comic. My suggestion is to work more on the comedy and your act will survive a lot longer than if you just juggle."¹⁵

Tasso took that advice to heart and as his humor evolved so did his ability to connect with any audience, as evidenced by his 30-year stint at Le Crazy Horse Saloon in Paris, an adults-only performance that catered to an audience *much* different than the families that took vacations in the Smoky Mountains or Wisconsin Dells.

Dieter landed in Paris through his friendship with comedian Wes Harrison, a colleague from Tommy Bartlett's. Harrison was working the off-season at the Crazy Horse Saloon when his wife Margaret suggested to club owner Alain Bernardin that he consider booking the comic juggler who was then working for Bartlett in Pigeon Forge.

"He would not come to Tennessee, so I made arrangements to get a booking at the Waldorf-Astoria," Dieter recalled. "I did not get paid for the date, but Bernardin flew to New York on the Concorde to see me."

Bernardin was impressed with Tasso's showmanship and offered him a short-term deal. "I went to Paris for a week, and I got a five-year contract," he said. "Then five years went by, and 30 years went by..."

According to Tasso, Bernardin had always wanted a juggler but the ceiling in the club was only eight feet high. Despite the challenge, Dieter made it work. "When I had five cups on my head and I stretched on my toes the teapot hit the ceiling," he recalled.

The Crazy Horse had never used talking acts prior to



Over the years Tasso developed into a world class comedian who was also a superb juggler.

John Hart photograph, Wisconsin State Journal

Dieter, and despite the possible language barrier, the jokes were an important part of his routine. "I did most of the act in English, but I also did a little bit in French, a little bit in German and a little bit in Japanese," he said. "I said, 'You like it? I do it again,' in six languages."

Bruno Quintero reviewed a 1990 performance for *Juggler's World*:

"Dieter pulled off the difficult stunt of pretending to be a bad juggler. The art of making the audience believe that the trick is about to fail, that the balance is so precarious that everything is bound to fall to the ground, is only successfully presented by the best. Dieter is the master of this material. He knows how to make the tension mount to a paroxysmal point, and then to release it just before the trick doesn't crash.

"In the second part he performed his trademark trick, tossing cups and saucers up to catch them on his head. He tossed the first saucer from his foot, then a cup followed, and landed with diabolical precision on the saucer. Then he put another saucer on his foot and threw it. It landed noiselessly on the cup. He added a third story while explaining to the astonished audience that he, too, was looking forward to the end of the show, but that he had to continue because it was part of his contract!

"At the fourth stage, his throw was visibly too high, and the cup passed over his head, and everyone was astonished to not hear breaking crockery behind him. But no! The trickster had made a blind catch with his hand behind his back!"¹⁶

For 30 years Tasso spent half of the year in Wisconsin Dells and the other half in Paris, and whether he was performing before an Arab sheik in Pigalle or a family from Kenosha, Dieter had impeccable timing.

"He was a total professional," recalled aerialist Michelangelo Nock, whose father Eugene and The Nerveless Nocks had appeared with Dieter on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. "He was a mentor to me, and I was fortunate to work with him at Tommy Bartlett starting in 1978," he said, adding, "I think that he taught a whole new generation what juggling and comedy was all about."¹⁷

Those sentiments were echoed by juggler T.J. Howell, who had been hired to appear in the same performance at The Tommy Bartlett Show. "To be on the stage with another comedian juggler is unheard of," Howell said, "and for me it was an honor to be in the same show as this great performer."¹⁸

Tasso's act followed T.J.'s juggling routine, and Dieter would acknowledge Howell with a typical self-deprecating joke, "I am not the best juggler in the world, probably not even the best you will see tonight. He has got everything. Youth. Talent. Hair. I hate him."

In reality, the two became close friends and Howell said that in the years that they shared a dressing room he developed tremendous admiration for the octogenarian's work ethic, and his skill. "Performing outside is extremely challenging for a juggler," he said. "Bouncing the top hats on his head in the wind was probably the most difficult trick he did at Tommy Bartlett because any wind at all would blow those hats. I told him that he should put some weights in them!"

Seven decades after he began performing, Dieter Tasso retired in 2017. At the time he was likely the oldest performing juggler in the world. "There are a lot of entertainers who stick around too long," Tom Diehl said. "Dieter was not one of those, even at 83."

"Retirement was tough at the beginning," Tasso said. "I miss the audiences."

Dieter once said that he could deliver the line, "You like it? I do it again!" in six languages, a long journey for a boy who could not speak English when he first arrived in New York. "I was always a frustrated comedian, and I realized that if my act was going to evolve, I had to learn the language," he said. "Learning English was a lot like juggling. It was repetition and practice."

That dedication is what made Dieter Tasso a superb juggler and a world-class comedian. He was an entertainer whose commitment to perfection led to decades of success.

Whether it was in a circus ring, a nightclub, or on a stage, for nearly 70 years, millions liked what they saw, and in return he did it, again, and again and again. **BW**



John Hart photograph, Wisconsin State Journal

Acknowledgements

This remarkable story could not have been told without the willingness of Dieter Tasso to speak with openness and candor about his life and career. In addition, the author is grateful for the assistance of Pat Boone, Maureen Brunsdale, Tom Diehl, Jerry Digney, Ushi Frimberger, John Hart, T.J. Howell, Evi Kelly-Lentz, Michelangelo Nock, Mark Schmitt, Peter Shrake, Lane Talburt and Timothy Tegge.

Endnotes

1. Irving Spiegel, "Big Town Thrills Artistes of Circus," *The New York Times*, Apr. 14, 1952, p. 28.
2. Angelo Nicholas, Audio Recording, Dieter Tasso Archives, Sarasota, Florida.
3. Irving Spiegel, "Circus' Mr. Eagle Makes Words Soar," *The New York Times*, Apr. 20, 1952, p. 49.
4. Unless otherwise noted, Dieter Tasso's comments and recollections are from a series of interviews conducted by the author by telephone or in Sarasota, Florida Apr. 25, 2020; July 10, 2020, Apr. 2, 2021, May 15, 2021 and May 20, 2021.
5. John Ringling North, II, telephone interview with the author, July 24, 2020.
6. Lane Talburt, "Dieter Tasso, A Juggler's Journey, July 2, 2012," *YouTube*, retrieved Apr. 14, 2021.
7. "Rival Jugglers Compete In Exciting Circus Display," *The Times Recorder* (Zanesville, Ohio), Jul. 9, 1954, p. 2.
8. "Dieter Tasso on The Good Old Days, BBC-1, Sep. 17, 1983," *YouTube*, retrieved May 1, 2021.
9. Pat Boone, email with the author, May 20, 2021
10. "Biggest Circuses Weld 'Big Tops,'" *The Miami Herald*, Jan. 9, 1961, p. 49.
11. Cheryl Ann Crase, "It's Just Like Vaudeville Again for

Hope," *The Daily Republic*, (Mitchell, South Dakota), Sep. 20, 1976, p. 1.

12. "McGuire Has Memories of Alexandria," *The Town Talk* (Alexandria, Louisiana), Mar. 21, 1967, p. 11.
13. "Globetrotter's Wife Dies, He Still Performs," *Great Falls Tribune*, (Great Falls, Montana), Jan. 18, 1969, p. 5.
14. Tom Diehl, telephone interview with the author, May 13, 2021.
15. Ron Dentinger, "You Like It? I Do It Again, The Dieter Tasso Story," CreateSpace, 2013.
16. Bruno Quintero, *Juggler's World*, "Dieter Tasso's Way is Stacking Cups the Hard Way," Summer, 1990, p. 16.
17. Michelangelo Nock, telephone interview with the author, May 13, 2021.
18. T.J. Howell, telephone interview with the author, May 13, 2021.

The Juggler

(This unusual bit of word-artistry, reprinted through courtesy of *The Saturday Review*, was penned by the noted poet, Robert Graves, and dedicated to Henry Ringling North after Graves had witnessed the performance of Dieter Tasso, the juggling wonder who flips cups, saucers and a teapot from toe to vertical head stack while balanced on a slack wire.)

Posturing one-legged on a slack wire,

He is no illusionist (nor I a liar)

When his free foot tosses in sequence up,
To be caught confidently by the joggled head,
Saucer, cup,

saucer, cup,

saucer, cup,

saucer, cup,

Each to fall fair and square on its mounting bed.
Wonder enough? Or not?

Not:

for a teapot

Floats up to crown them; item, following soon,
Supererogatory lump-sugar, and spoon.

Thus the possible is transcended
By a prankster's pride in true juggling,
Twice daily for weeks at Ringling's ring,
Until the seasonal circuit's ended—
An act one degree only less absurd
Than mine: of slipperily balancing
Word

upon word

upon word

upon word,

Each wanton as an eel, daft as a bird.

Remembering

Carla Wallenda

by Rick Wallenda

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

Her first professional appearance on a highwire placed little Carla not only in the spotlight with her legendary parents, Karl and Helen Wallenda, but also on film with the great clown Lou Jacob.¹ The Castle Films newsreel titled *Hi Wire Lay Off with Lou Jacob and Little Carla*,² appeared in cinemas in 1939. During the film young Carla walked across the wire under the watchful eyes of Papa Karl, always called Vati, and her nervous mother Helen, affectionately known as Mutti. Karl and Helen of the famed Wallenda troupe, had arrived in America eleven years before, stunning audiences with their show-stopping debut with *The Greatest Show on Earth* at Madison Square Garden on April 5, 1928. Little Carla arrived a few years later on February 13, 1936. Ella Bradna offered her guidance as godparent, and Helen Wallenda named her new baby Carla Ella Wallenda.

The Great Wallendas were stars of the Ringling circus through the strike-shortened season of 1938. They returned to *The Greatest Show on Earth* in 1942 where they thrilled audiences for five more seasons. It was during those years that Carla literally grew up on the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey train and on the lots where the show set up during its coast-to-coast tours.

During their seasons with Ringling-Barnum, Karl and Helen began intensive training of their young progeny. Carla learned all the aerial routines offered by the Wallenda family including the basics of web, lyre, cloud-swing, Roman ladders, perch, iron jaw, and many tricks on the highwire pyramids. She also learned to do splits, headstands, as well as the delicate art of taking her bow, all while others were fighting a war far away.

Carla learned not only the art of performing, but also the importance of grace as her grandmother, Kunnigunde Grotfent, taught her that when her foot left the floor, her

toe should be pointed. Karl drilled into her sub-consciousness that it is not what you do but how you do it. Helen guided her in wardrobe and make-up. The strength of generational artists



When Carla Wallenda rose to a standing position on the three-high bicycle pyramid, she joined only two others who had accomplished the death-defying trick – her mother Helen and Aunt “Yetty” Grotfent.

The Authentic Wallenda Archives



In 1942, under the watchful eye of her father and legendary highwire daredevil Karl Wallenda, six-year-old Carla rehearsed in the backyard of the family's Sarasota home on Arlington Street.
Circus World Museum

productions, including the aerial moons. Carla's 19-year-old sister Jenny Wallenda, who had recently arrived in the United States from occupied Germany, did not perform with the new Wallenda show. She soon left the family to join the Ringling circus and marry her sweet-heart, Alberto Zoppé.

It was on a fine Florida afternoon four years later, in 1951, when Carla returned home from her school, the Out of Door Academy, that Papa Wallenda surprised her with a challenge. "Carla, do the headstand on the pyramid, and we will take you along in the wire act this season." Every afternoon her books flew to the corner, and she ran to practice the headstand. A little over two years later, the Cleveland Grotto Circus was first up for Carla and her headstand.

As the story was passed down, it was at the Public Hall in downtown Cleveland, where Carla proudly slipped on the matching costume and lined up with the rest of the troupe, climbed the ladder, and first took her place on

Below, Carla, seen here with her mother Helen Wallenda in the family's dressing room wagon, literally grew up trouping with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

The Authentic Wallenda Archives

poured into her being before she graduated elementary school. Carla filled her free time with training for this artform before other kids learned to ride a bicycle, and she learned to ride a bike on the wire, too!

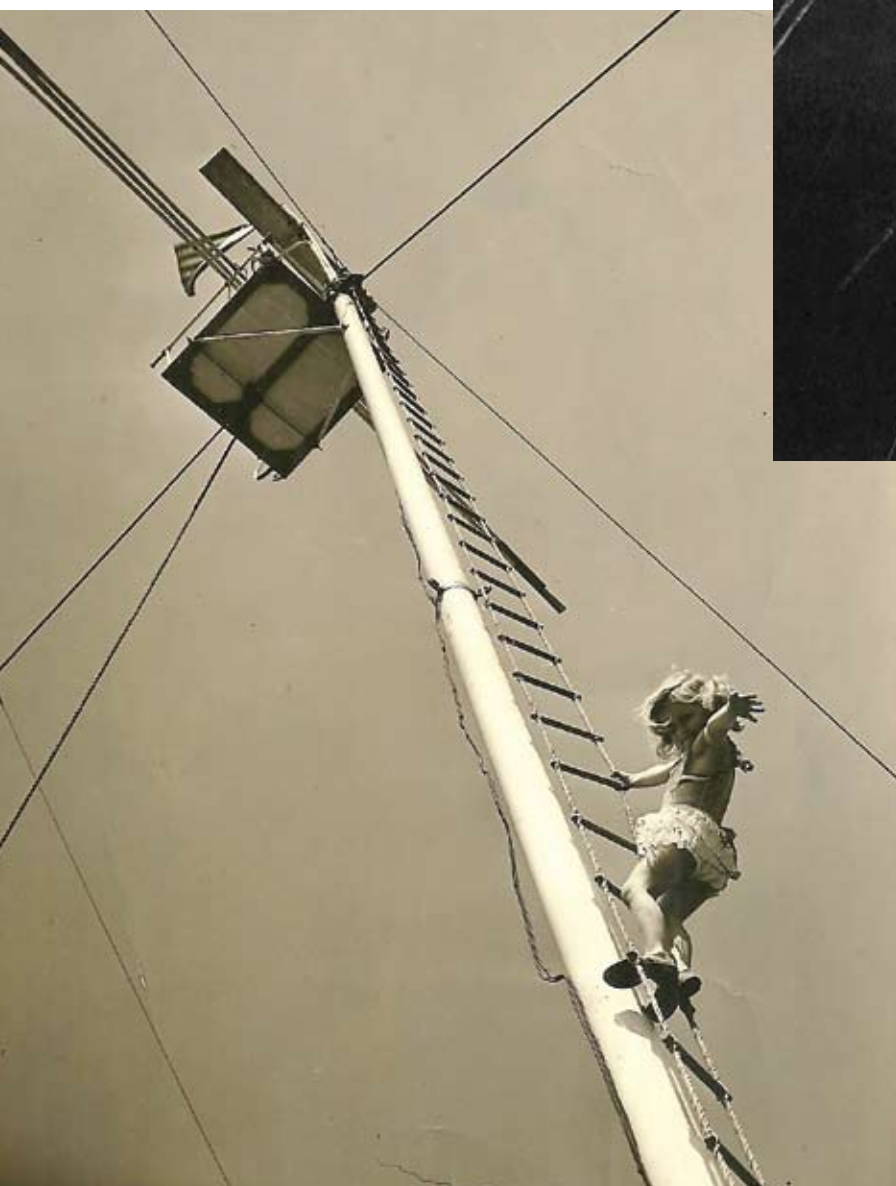
By the time Carla was ten years old she had spent the better part of eight years on the Ringling train, under its big top, doing spec with the Doll family, performing in one of the show's aerial offerings, eating in the cook tent, and developing life-long friendships with many of the show's performers.

At age eleven, when the Wallenda Circus opened for the first time in Bradenton, Florida on April 8, 1947, Carla was finally part of the program, but not on the highwire. It was Carla's aunt, Henrietta "Rietta" Kries Grotofent – fondly called "Yetty" – who topped the new seven-person pyramid³ and climbed the 140-foot high swaypole. Carla appeared in several of the aerial



the highwire with The Great Wallendas. Her turn for the headstand arrived. With understanders riding the bikes, Carla mounted the pyramid. In the middle of the wire, she raised her rump into the air, but her feet would not rise from the shoulder bar. The understanders, Uncle Herman Wallenda in the rear, carried her to the pedestal in that position. Subsequent shows went better, and this writer witnessed many headstands on the pyramid. Carla was the only Wallenda girl to ever accomplish that trick.

Still in Cleveland a few shows later everything was running smoothly when Carla's turn to top the Seven arrived. Her first opportunity to ride the giant pyramid before her, she sat on the chair, and then stood when the pyramid stopped in the middle of the wire, just as her Aunt Yetty had done for the previous four years. The



This photograph recorded the future aerial star climbing the rope ladder to the highwire platform towering above.

The Authentic Wallenda Archives



The seven-person pyramid was a giant assemblage of human performers, balance poles and shoulder bars slowly moving in cadence across the high steel cable. Carla first performed at the top of the "Seven" in 1951 when she was 15 years of age.

Circus World Museum

original group of understanders from the 1947 season now included some replacements for the 1951 season.

Only a few months before, the Wallendas suffered their first tragic loss when Philip Kries died in a highway accident near Omaha, Nebraska. His replacement, Tabby Anderson, had been recruited the previous season and was hastily trained in Billings, Montana after the accident. He was now poised in the front position. In fact, three replacements for originals in the Seven joined the act successively. First, Joe Geiger injured his heel when the descent rope broke in 1949. His replacement, Don Edwards, quickly managed. Then Uncle Philip, and last, the United States Army called Uncle Gunther into Korean War service. Joe Seitz also joined the troupe as a replacement.



In the mid-1950s, the Great Wallendas appeared with the Clyde Beatty Circus. Carla, second from the right, posed along with other members of the troupe including her mother and father, Helen and Karl, fourth and fifth from the right.

The Authentic Wallenda Archives

The six understanders who carried Carla in the seven-person pyramid included originals Uncle Arthur Grotefent, her father Karl Wallenda and his elder brother Herman. During the act, Carla climbed to the top, sat on the chair, and performed as if she had been there naturally for decades, standing up on the chair at the apex of the monolithic pyramid. She would later say the headstand was a much harder trick.

Carla participated in the Seven through the 1950s, alternating with others. After Aunt Yetty retired from the highwire in 1953, she and Arthur toured with her swaypole act that frequently appeared on the same bill as The Great Wallendas highwire troupe. In addition to Carla, Patsy Jordan, Jenny Wallenda, and even Helen Wallenda all mounted the pyramid during that decade.

Carla told me that once in Mexico City, "Eddie Harrigan froze up so we couldn't do the Seven. All the performers from the Ringling show were in the building that night, so Papa asked Uncle Herman if we should do the two high on the chair on bikes. Uncle Herman said okay, and so did I. Before that night I only practiced the trick." During that performance, Carla climbed to stand on her father's shoulders while he stood on the chair, a trick previously accomplished

only by her Aunt Yetty and her mother, Helen.

Over the years Carla lost count of how many understanders she worked with. "I think once I counted and it was 17."⁴

Carla and her husband, Paul Jordan, left the Wallenda troupe to form their own act at the end of the 1961 season. The Jordan Troupe contracted with Rudy Bros. Circus for the 1962 season. That winter they appeared in nightclubs and theaters in New York City doing trampoline, hand-balancing, lyre, and other smaller acts.

The 1962 season began for The Great Wallendas at the mighty Moslem Temple Shrine Circus in Detroit, but it was during that date that the Seven stopped performing. January 30, 1962 was the night of tragedy that no Wallenda could ever forget, least of all Carla. At that time sister Jenny and Jana Schepp took the responsibility of alternating at the top of the Seven. On that night in Detroit Jana mounted the pyramid, but neither she nor her brother Deiter, ever made it to the platform. Although Jana survived, Deiter did not, nor did Jenny's husband, Dick Faughnan. Carla's brother, Mario, was left paralyzed for life. That ended an era for The Great Wallendas highwire troupe, but the survivors of the tragedy continued as a new chapter opened.

Carla and Paul Jordan trouped with Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus in 1963. They were joined by Raymond Chitty to form a highwire trio that was billed as The Three Jordans featuring Carla Wallenda. They went out again with Beatty-Cole for the 1964 season, a time when the show was unquestionably the largest circus under canvas in the United States. It featured great performers such as wild animal trainer Clyde Beatty, the Lucio Cristiani riding act (using the Francini name), the Flying Gaonas, and, of course, Carla Wallenda.

Barely fifteen months after the Detroit accident, Aunt Yetty fell from her swaypole in Omaha, Nebraska, near where her brother had been killed 13 years earlier. She died that night. Carla assumed the pole act for the 1965 season, and rejoined The Great Wallendas highwire act where she continued to perform until the end of the decade. The pole became her solo act.

At the end of the 1969 season, Carla again left the Wallenda troupe. She and her husband,

Richard Guzman, continued with the swaypole and a hanging perch act. Carla's pole towered at 110 feet, slightly lower than Aunt Yetty's pole had been. Carla appeared with a few circuses, but outdoor attractions such as fairs and festivals began to request the sensational pole for their events. Her swaypole reached as high as the double Ferris-wheel, creating an astounding visual attraction for those events.

Sadly, in July 1972, Carla's new husband was killed while helping Vati (Karl) with a skywalk in Wheeling, West Virginia. Carla continued in the Wallenda tradition, meeting the challenges of erecting the pole relying on her sons, Ricky and Mario, and others sent from Vati to help move the rigging. Carla went beyond traditional boundaries with her swaypole. The 84 Lumber Company began opening new stores across the country, and grand opening events included lumber jacks and Carla Wallenda climbing the pole. Carla created a new market for her towering pole, and still sought other opportunities to exceed normal limitations. On one

occasion Carla and Mike Morgan presented the hanging perch act beneath a hot air balloon and another time dangling below a helicopter.

During her long career, Carla Wallenda set herself apart as a truly diverse performer. As a child, she practiced with many other performers, learning from them yet developing her own unique abilities as a special artist. Mornings involved hustling into the building or tent to find someone practicing. Carla would watch and sometimes participate with other acts in their rehearsals. Often an act needed some-

one to fill in for a sick or injured person. Papa "Vati" Wallenda would offer Carla as a substitute for anyone needing temporary help. Her diversity as a performer was evident as she later told stories of flying with Billy Woods and Bob Porter, performing on aerial ladders with Papa Perof, the cradle with the Aregonies, and bareback riding with the Bostok-Bogino troupe and Alberto Zoppé. She also performed Risley with the Bogino troupe, trampoline with the Jordans and George Hubler, teeterboard with the Jordans and Dubskys,



Carla Wallenda was featured on Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus in 1963 and 1964. In this troupe picture taken in August 1963, she was flanked by Raymond Chitty on the left and her husband Paul Jordan on the right.

Illinois State University Milner Library, Special Collections

and styled on elephants for Arkie Scott and Walter King.

Carla performed in Roman ladder acts, on the cloud-swing, in web productions, carousel acts, loop-to-loop, swinging ladders, and aerial moons. She worked for producers like Al Dobritch, Frank Wirth, Tom Packs, Barnes and Carruthers, D. R. Miller, Orin Davenport, E. K. Fernandez in Hawaii, Clyde Beatty, the Dubsky brothers, Jordan, and appeared with Atayde Bros. and Bell Bros. in Mexico, the Deutschland Halle in Berlin, and Santos y Artigas and Circo Imperial in Cuba, including the year of the Castro revolution when she was stranded for five days.

For decades Carla Wallenda was a headliner at fairs, corporate events, parks, and grand openings for malls, hotels and lumber yards. She appeared on television with Ed Sullivan, on *Hollywood Palace*, *Seal Test Big Top*, the *Bozo Show*, the *Jerry Lewis Telethon*, and in several documentaries. She also performed in night clubs such as the Latin Quarter in New York City and on the stage in Broadway's



Carla Wallenda, who performed on top of the skyscraping sway pole for more than 45 years, is visible in this 2012 photograph near the end of her magnificent career.

The Authentic Wallenda Archives

Palace Theater.

Carla also produced her own show, *The Carla Wallenda Aerial Thrill Show* for fairs, festivals, and parks. Occasionally, she expanded the show to a two-hour thriller adding The Great Wallendas highwire troupe for larger events such as in Kingston, Jamaica and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In November 2010, Carla appeared with her son, Ricky, in his highwire act at the Broward County Fair in Hollywood, Florida along with twelve-year-old Briana. This marked another first as the youngest and eldest to walk the wire together.

Carla was inducted into the Sarasota's Circus Ring of Fame in Sarasota in 2019.

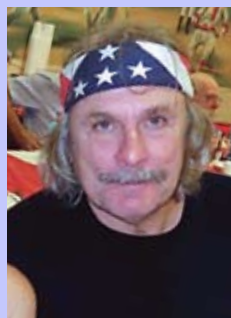
Carla Wallenda, the only daughter of legendary circus daredevils, Karl and Helen Wallenda, died on March 6, 2021. She had topped the seven-person pyramid on the highwire for eleven years, and then continued her long career performing her signature headstands atop a towering sway-pole.

More than 80 years have passed since Carla Wallenda's first professional appearance in the 1939 newsreel. That performance had established her as the youngest ever to walk on a highwire, and when she retired at age 81, she was believed to be the oldest active aerialist, having achieved a world record for the longest unbroken streak of seasons performing in the air – over seven decades. Her legacy – and the tradition of the Great Wallendas – lives on and will continue through the lives of three children,⁵ nine grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren. **BW**

Endnotes

1. German-born Johann Ludwig Jacob was professionally known as Lou Jacobs; he appeared with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey for more than 60 years.
2. This film is available from The Authentic Wallenda Archives.
3. The seven-person highwire pyramid debuted in 1947 after the Great Wallendas left Ringling-Barnum.
4. A complete list of the Wallenda understanders can be found in The Authentic Wallenda Archives.
5. Carla had four children – Enrico “Ricky,” Rietta, Valerie and Mario B. Wallenda who died in 1993.

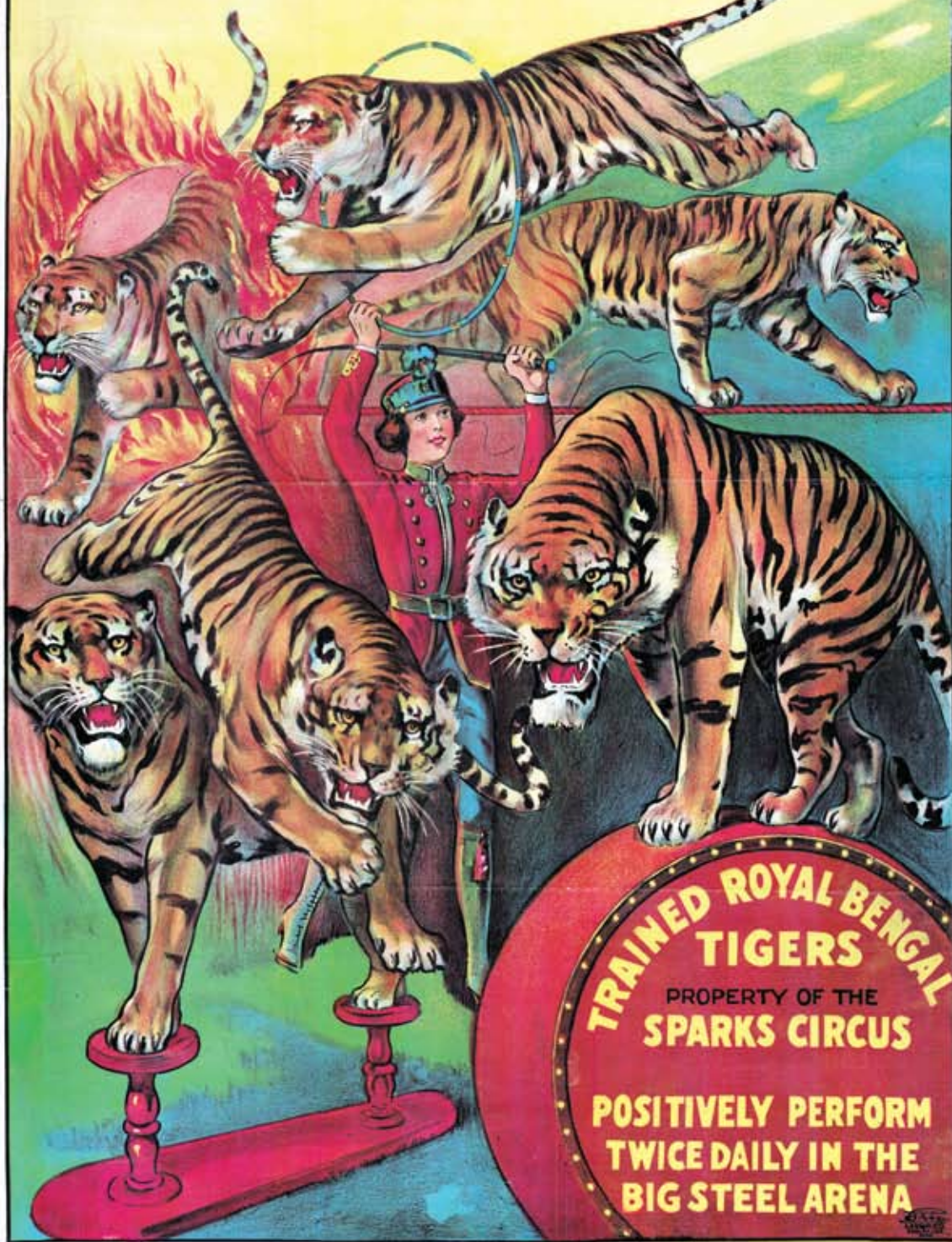
About the Author



Born into circus celebrity, Rick Wallenda took the daredevil challenge following his famed mother, Carla, and legendary grandfather, Karl. Rick added to his credentials when he enrolled in Eckerd College, completing his BA in just three years, and entered Vermont College of Fine Arts where he earned his MFA degree in writing. Never leaving the highwire, Rick participated with family to accomplish a Guinness World Record eight-person pyramid in 2001. In 2008, Rick broke his grandfather's record for distance, walking a highwire at Kings Island amusement park over 2,000 feet. Today Rick spends his time managing investments, writing and playing guitar at the local House of Prayer once per week, but is still available to pursue new highwire endeavors.

The 20th Century Masterpiece

SPARKS CIRCUS



**TRAINED ROYAL BENGAL
TIGERS**
PROPERTY OF THE
SPARKS CIRCUS

**POSITIVELY PERFORM
TWICE DAILY IN THE
BIG STEEL ARENA**

Registration Form

2021 Circus Historical Society Annual Convention

September 19th through September 22nd • Trumbull Marriott, Trumbull CT

Name (to be displayed on your name badge) _____

Spouse/Guest _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Prov. _____ Zip/Postal Code _____

Registration fees include the opening reception, all seminars, meetings, auction, tours of Barnum Museum and other Bridgeport sites and annual banquet. Tickets and transportation to The Big E Circus Spectacular are not included in the Registration Fee. The convention begins at 7:00 P.M. on Sunday September 19th with an Opening Reception and ends on September 22nd at The Big E.

\$190 - Registration Member/spouse/guest each until 07/01/21

Number _____ Total \$ _____

\$250 - Registration Non-member (includes \$60 membership)

Number _____ Total \$ _____

\$100 - Student Registration

Number _____ Total \$ _____

\$ 25 - Additional Late Fee after 07/01/21

Number _____ Total \$ _____

\$ 50 - Additional At-the-Door Late Fee

Number _____ Total \$ _____

\$ 50 - Virtual – Seminars Only Registration Fee

Number _____ Total \$ _____

\$ 12 - Big E Circus ticket(s)

Number _____ Total \$ _____

\$ 30 - Roundtrip bus ride to and from The Big E

Number _____ Total \$ _____

Grand Total \$ _____

Cancellation Refunds: 100% before August 1st, 50% from August 2nd to August 31st. No refund after August 31st.

**Mail the completed Registration Form with check
made payable to "Circus Historical Society" to:**

Circus Historical Society
P.O. Box 220643
Dorchester MA 02122

Register on-line with credit card on the CHS website: <https://circushistory.org/>

Hotel Information

Trumbull Marriott, 180 Hawley Lane, Trumbull, CT 06611 USA. Telephone +1 (203) 378-1400

Website: <https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/bdrct-trumbull-marriott-shelton/>

\$125 per night plus taxes and fees. This rate includes free parking and breakfast for two.

It will only be available until either the room block is filled or until August 19, 2021, whichever is first.

Reservations: Call (203) 378-1400. Ask for the "Circus Historical Society Rate."

Online: Book your group rate for Circus Historical Society National Convention Sept 2021.

For additional information, including sponsorships and sales & display table rentals, please contact
Kristin Lee, CHS Convention Chair at kristin.dawn.lee@gmail.com or (781) 539-7685.

Rideshare Information

If you will have a vehicle at the convention, please indicate if you are willing to give a ride to other conventioners to either the Bridgeport sites on Tuesday and/or to the Big E on Wednesday. Bridgeport _____ Big E _____ Number of passengers _____